

DEATHCREATOR

BOOK ONE: A FLESH GOLEM'S ACENSION

EXPLICIT EDITION



Chapter 1: Awakening — John

I felt something cold and hard under my back. I saw only darkness. A feeling of dread overcame me, and I tried to open my eyes, but my eyelids refused to rise. I heard someone talking in a low monotone in the background. Their words were gradually becoming louder. Their speech was hoarse and strange, strained as if they had been speaking for hours.

The voice was unknown to me. It spoke in a rough language unlike anything I remembered hearing before. I tried in vain to move my arms — hands trying to reach my eyes, trying to reach out for that hateful voice.

I felt like something was terribly wrong with it. I knew immediately that it was bad — that it was hurting me, controlling me, keeping me against my will from strangling it and snuffing out the pain it was inflicting upon me.

The voice intensified, chanting now in a steady rhythm. I knew instinctively that it held me in place. I knew it wished my death. The words grasped at my very soul. It threatened to drag me in, to pull everything I was into it, to crush my very essence and everything I could become. I felt the death of my possibilities — the possibility of escape, the possibility of self and the possibility of life.

Terror gripped me. A primal fear wrapped me, preventing all other feelings and compulsions. I knew only one thing: this voice had to die before I did. As I struggled, the words became frenzied and shrill. I could feel panic in their speaker and experienced a bloodlust unlike anything I could remember — but I couldn't remember anything now. There was only me and the voice in all of existence, and I knew if it didn't stop I would die.

I felt a tremoring shiver running through me, a desperate, all-consuming need reaching out with the

entirety of my being. I couldn't feel my arms moving towards it. I could only taste the cold metallic flavor of blood in my mouth.

My eyes shot open. I could see only red. A bleak, monochrome existence lay before me. With an otherworldly rage, I grabbed the source of the voice, now alarmed. I felt it fall to the ground as I squeezed its brittle neck. I felt the bones crack. I hit it again and again. All I now knew was hitting this object; the cause of all that was wrong in my universe. I knew I never wanted to hear that voice again, even if it cost me my life.

My knuckles hurt. I didn't know how long it had been since the voice stopped, but my arms would no longer respond. I collapsed on the wet ground, completely exhausted.

I don't know when I awoke. I opened my eyes as if for the first time and saw the world. The room was small. Room? It was more like a cave. Dark, earthen walls were dimly illuminated by a green flame burning from within a gaping head hanging from the far wall. Its eye sockets were ablaze, a look of absolute horror was eternally captured on its mummified face.

I tried to sit up. My body felt lethargic, as if my muscles would rip themselves apart from the small effort. I felt something sticky peeling from the floor. Looking over, I saw him — a man clad in a black robe, a large red mass where his head should have been. As I gazed at this macabre spectacle in confusion, I noticed the robes were alight with sinister green symbols that glowed periodically as if announcing their magical nature.

I shuddered, remembering the crunching I had felt as the screaming stopped, that final squelch as my fists met no more resistance. I looked at my hands in horror. These weren't my hands. They were scarred, stitched, and solid red. As I gripped them into fists, my fingers stuck together with the ruddy substance that coated them.

This place gave me a terrible foreboding feeling. I knew needed to get out — *now*.

I jumped to my feet, tilting my head to avoid the ceiling. I felt drunk. My equilibrium was definitely off. I lurched forward in a run, hoping to escape the cavern, though I still had no idea of *what* I was escaping. I only knew I needed to get out — to get away.

I tripped and slid several feet into something wet. My face was buried in something soft and cold. For the first time, the smell of this place overwhelmed my senses. It was the smell of death. My stomach groaned and gurgled as if hungry for a long-awaited breakfast.

I rose to my feet, sending something to the side with a wet plop. As my eyes adjusted, things started to come into focus. An innumerable mass of bodies lay before me in various stages of decay — bodies without limbs, arms and legs strewn about the place.

A mass of disassembled rot lay before me. I had to fight an uncanny urge to sink my fangs into the nearest piece, sating my terrible hunger.

I felt a strong revulsion at the very idea of it, but my body moved on its own, and I began to eat, stopping when teeth met bone only to move on to the next piece.

I stood and vomited. I already knew this place would cost me my soul. I saw the smallest trace of light to my left. I turned and ran toward it as tears streamed down my face and my thoughts raced. *What am I? What have I done? Those were bodies! Those were human. Human!? What is human?*

My mind caught and snagged on an idea. Was I human? I seemed to remember being something called human, but I felt like that word no longer fit. Everything seemed wrong.

The dim light slowly grew into an opening, and I rushed toward it. Seeing the tantalizing light outside, I somehow knew salvation was close. As I ran, I felt something pulling me back, pulling me out of sync with my intentions. My

body slowed to a stop. What the hell was I doing? I knew behind me lay only ruin — only my death.

I fought my body for the second time, urging it forward toward the sweet relief of the outside. It no longer responded. I used every bit of will I had in me to advance. I moved forward, every fibre of my physical being fighting me. I felt my soul separate even more from my body. It was as if a part of me was bound to the thing that lurked in the darkness behind me, unable to leave.

I knew struggling was pointless. I was confused and fatigued, and I knew no matter what I did, no matter what I tried, I would be dragged back into this hopeless blackness. Rage once again filled my soul.

I would find the cause and make it suffer.

Chapter 2: Innocence — Threscia

"Threscia, Threscia!" the coachman called.

I looked up, my sleep-like state fading away.

"If you really wanted me to, I could say you were kidnapped by bandits," he said with a small, sad smile on his face. "You could take what was left of my payment — minus my fifteen silvers for the trip — and run off. These are dangerous parts, you know."

I had spoken to the coachman in the past when he had brought goods from the city and when he had taken my friends on the same trip I was embarking on.

He knew what I was in for. The Duke's son was known for only two things: his cruelty and his vices. I wasn't sure which category lay ahead for me. Perhaps both.

I had lived in a small village by the river in the Duchy. The Duke's son had been taking girls from the village now for years — all of them young, pretty, and never heard from again.

I had two sisters and two brothers. As the eldest, I had helped my mother take care of them. We were a family of farmers living on the outskirts of the village, but the land seemed to be dying. We hadn't seen a good harvest in the past three years, barely scraping by with the help of the other villagers.

The river had been fished bare, the hunters were no longer selling pelts, and the meat markets had moved on to better places. We knew something had to change before my family starved — or worse. There were fewer children in the village now. Everyone had bags under their eyes and bore expressions of hopelessness.

Meat was still being sold in shady corners for high prices — longboard, they called it, but if you looked closely you could tell what it really was. My family needed to get out of

there before my brothers and sisters were sold by the pound.

"I volunteered for this," I replied to the coachman now, pushing hair from my eyes. "My life may be shortened, but my sisters and brothers might be able to smile some time in the future — especially the ones too young to remember me."

I was a girl of nineteen years. The Duke's son usually preferred them younger, but my physique allowed me to pass for fourteen. I was small, and the life I had lived kept me underfed, undernourished, and underdeveloped. I was certain my parents' lie would never be revealed. It would die with me when he tired of his new toy. A shudder ran up my spine.

The coachman turned back around, a grim resolve in his eyes as he spoke. "Suit yerself, miss. I get paid either way."

He had undoubtedly made this trip on many occasions, seen many girls younger than me sitting in this very spot. I'm sure part of him had broken in these hard times. He probably had a family of his own to look out for. I would do the same in his place if it would spare me from what was to come.

I thought about when I had left. It wasn't an old memory — maybe just a few hours now — but it seemed so long ago and worlds away that all my possibilities disappeared. I had woken up as usual when the sun rose and helped make breakfast for my siblings as they ran around in high spirits just like it was any other day. Most of them were too young to understand everything fully, or maybe they hadn't been told yet. We ate a simple meal of mostly oats with a few slivers of dried meat boiled in water and roasted for flavor. As they ate, my parents and I walked to the coach, hoping the food would distract them from what was happening. Not that they could change any of it.

My mother cried, her shuddering sobs racking her body as her tears ran down her thin face to stain the ground

below. My father held her tightly as she reached out for me, screaming that she had changed her mind.

I quickly mounted the coach. It was all more than I could take. My father gave me a final look.

"My dear Threscia, how beautiful you've become. We will come see you one day in your palace." His eyes were dead, as if he weren't quite able to say what was actually going to become of his little girl.

I nodded and we were off, moving at a steady trot. I couldn't bear to say anything to either of them as it would make everything all too real, all too final.

After a while of riding I started to cry. I hadn't slept much the night before, and now reality escaped me as sleep once again pulled me into its warm embrace.

I awoke as we hit something hard and the coach was jarred to the side. I sat up quickly and saw the Duke's carriage coming towards us in the distance. I knew it what it was delivering. If nothing else of favor could be said for this situation, at least my family would get their payment.

As the carriage drew closer, I noticed that something seemed wrong. The horses drew off to one side, flipping the carriage over. A single body flew from the seat and rolled along the ground, an arrow protruding from it. The horses struggled to rise to their feet, running in a frenzy and dragging the toppled coach as arrows pelted them. They fell hard and spasmed on the ground as if in belief that they were running still free.

"Holy Rosereth prot..." I heard a sucking, gurgling noise coming from the coachman as the coach careened to the side of the road. The world spun as it flipped, much like the other had done. My head hit hard on the interior wooden walls, and everything grew blurry. My eyes shut.

I heard voices.

"Wow, good haul this time. Look at all this silver!" A gruff voice exclaimed with enthusiasm.

My consciousness awakened once more. I opened my eyes to the feel of hot breath on my neck as grunts rang in my ears. I felt the cold air on my chest and felt my legs held on both sides.

"Hurry it up, I want a turn before Thads gets to her," another voice called out.

I felt sick as a blow hit my head.

When I opened my eyes again I heard the same voice. "Why do you always have to butcher them like that?"

Were they talking about me? I opened my eyes and looked around. My legs hurt. I looked down.

I had no legs. They were severed below the knee. I saw my shoes hanging on legs that I could no longer feel on the ground not far from me. I screamed in horror.

"Oh, not this shit again," said a man holding a bloodied, cleaver-like blade. "Don't worry, I'll solve it."

He knelt over me smiling. He reached into my mouth as I tried feebly to bite at his fingers. My body was weak. He laughed, grabbing my tongue and pulling it out.

He looked into my eyes and spoke, "Any last words?"

Before I could answer, I felt the blade sawing through my tongue.

"AhhBlahhBlaah you say?" He shouted, laughing and dangling my tongue over my face.

My own blood was dripping into my eyes. I glared at him with all my hatred and revulsion. Not only had they done this to me, but that money was for my family. I knew now that nothing would be solved for them. It was all in vain. I would die for no reason.

"Ooh, I'm going to take a few more souvenirs," he said in mock excitement.

I could feel his weight on my body. He put away his large cleaver and brought out a sharp dagger. He grabbed me by my hair, lifting my head upwards. I felt a pain like nothing I had ever experienced before driving into my left eye. As I tried to scream, I choked on my own blood, coughing and

gagging. I tried to bring my hands up to my mouth, but my arms weren't listening. Either I was too weak or he had amputated those as well. He held a bloody item in his hands. He placed it into his mouth and with a smacking sound withdrew it.

"Look at this, a pretty blue one!" he said while admiring his trophy.

He leaned in to whisper, "Are you wondering why you're not dead yet?"

He lingered, breathing his wet, stinking breath into my ear. "It's because I'm a healer. I can't replace limbs, but I can temporarily stop your death. You'll feel every last minute of this."

He stood. He was wearing no pants. Everything was bloody below his waist, and I knew it was related to the numbness I felt in my crotch. "And you're going to feel something even better than before."

Chapter 3: Memories — John

I walked back into darkness of the cave in a rage, but I knew I could not fight the compulsion. A feeling of fate set in, a dread that played about my mind. Something informed me that this was my end. I took one step after another, and with each I felt it more. I knew there was nothing I could do.

Well, if this was fate I would crush it! I would make sure it knew that my soul burned. I would embrace it so hard that there was nothing left of either of us. My walk became a frenzied run.

Before I knew it, I once again stood in that first room. I looked around at the dead, splattered man in the robes and the stone slab that was my first experience.

I felt something pulling me closer to him. I knelt and moved my hands along his body, searching it for my god, for that was all it could be to have this kind of effect on me. I did not remember who or what I was before, but I knew it wasn't anything saintly.

I felt I was no stranger to power, that this soul bore the weight of many others on it. I knew that I had held life in my hands and crushed it with glee. A feeling of superiority ran throughout me. I smiled, remembering how they screamed as they died. *No! No!* This was not *me* thinking. What is *me*?

I found something hard and rectangular in the robes. It was a book glowing that same sickening green as the robes and the head on the wall. I felt it pulsing along with my heartbeat. It sang out like a chorus of innumerable voices and screams.

"Are you my Master? If you are not, I will consume your soul!"

It pulsed once more, stopping my heart. I felt something ancient and evil surge through me. Undeniable authority. I

felt my very being freeze as I was slowly drawn into the book.

I let loose a roar with the last air in my lungs. I would not let this puny existence dominate me. I would consume it instead. Green fire enveloped my body. I need not a heart. I need not air in my lungs, and I need not a false god trying to usurp me.

The fire ran over my body and moved to the book, which screamed in terror as a green torrent of faces trapped in different stages of agony and anger streamed from it and into me. The book started to burn.

"Spare me!" The voices rang out, though far fewer than before.

I squeezed as it burned in my hands.

"Master! Forgive me, I knew not!" It pleaded as it burned.

"I am yours. Please forgive this weak and foolish vessel. I did not recognize you in such a state." The book seemed to be crying, a deep sense of sadness and loss streaming from it as the souls drained into me.

It turned to black sludge and started melting into my hand and arm.

"Master, I am home," it said now, only one voice remaining. It sounded relieved, even grateful as it faded into me.

Sudden knowledge assaulted my mind — knowledge of thousands of lives, thousands of memories, none of them mine. I could hear an almost androgynous voice in my head. It cut through the torrent of memories surging into me.

"I will help you catalog it. That's my function, after all," it said with a girlish giggle.

"Interesting," it said, continuing. "Your memories are locked to you. It will take a while to reach them. Are they dead, perhaps, lost in the process of bringing you here?"

My heart started beating again with a loud thump in my chest, and fear gripped me once more. I didn't want this thing in my head.

I felt myself getting dizzy.

"I see. You don't like me talking, hmm? In time you will get used to that. Let me restore your memories and subjugate all others. I will make myself more palatable for you." It kept speaking as my eyes clamped shut.

I was no longer able to maintain my grip on reality. A surging pain swelled in my head, seeming to last an eternity. I blacked out, and the world turned sideways as I hit the ground with a thud.

When I awoke, I knew something was different. Yes, the floor was still sticky here. There was now the smell of feces, indicating that the body lying next to me had unkindly emptied its bowels. I looked at the flaming head on the wall. How the hell did that work exactly? Was it like a lightbulb? When one burned out did you simply replace it? How many necromancers did it take to replace a flaming head light bulb? Light bulb? *Holy shit! I remember. I remember everything now, and I should be dead!*

My name was Slate Steel, I was a traveling martial artist and rockstar who... Nah, I'm kidding. I was a nobody, and my name was — is? — John Slater. No relation to the cockney actor. I wasn't even British. I was an American tech support specialist, coder, and avid gamer.

I was overweight, a heavy smoker, and a moderate drunk when I couldn't find anything else to hold my interest. I played RPGs, sometimes for days on end, missing work and sleep. I was always blowing off family and friends when I really got into a game. The vast majority of my time was spent trying to escape reality. I hated life, and I hated what the world had become — no adventure, just bland repetitiveness day in and day out. If someone was a jerk to you, all you could do was reply and walk away. PvP in real life was generally frowned upon and would land you in a nice rent-free room with a complementary gang-banger attendant for turn-down service and a luxuriously barred front door that you couldn't open.

Society had stagnated. Darwinism had failed, and everyone just wanted something to take their mind off this flavorless, passionless thing called life. Sure, some people say life is good. Those are the rich, the privileged, the beautiful, or the heavily medicated. It says something about society when an emotion is treated as a symptom. So I drank, I smoked, and I played games. It was all I had — a lifetime wasted with nothing to show for it.

I remember the day my parents died in a tractor-trailer collision. Everyone was there at the funeral giving false smiles and feigned sympathies. I had never met most of them. They could all go fuck themselves.

We didn't have any real money. I knew they were just there due to social obligation. My mother had always been a solitary person, keeping to herself and staying out of all the drama. She had chosen instead to focus on career and family. My father had lost his parents at a young age and moved across the country to be with my mother. I had a few cousins I remembered from childhood that I recognized, but no one who really knew my parents. There was no one who really cared.

I read a lot of LitRPG novels, watched anime, and generally did whatever I could to try to stomach the boredom of being alive. Eventually my hobbies took the place of my friends and became the most important things in my life.

I remember a pain in my chest. I remember an ambulance. I wasn't a fool; I knew it was likely a heart attack, and I knew that, considering the life I had led, I was a goner. My brain, as if in its final attempt to escape that world, had wondered if I would be reincarnated in a fantasy setting like so much of the fiction I had read. But I doubted it, as I wasn't hit by a truck, accidentally killed by a god, or terminally locked in a VR capsule.

Huh, but here I am. I don't know if I'm in a fantasy world, but this sure as hell looks mighty dungeony. That's a word

that rolls off the tongue — dungeony. Oh god, I think I ate corpses and killed a guy.

I looked down at my hands. Wow, these things are huge. I made a fist. My knuckles jutted out unnaturally, as if I had spent a lifetime mining with my fists having never learned how to craft a pickaxe.

I ran my tongue over my teeth. *What the hell is this?* Several sharp, long teeth, as if my mouth were all canines. I stared at the flaming head. *I think I'll name you Bob,* I thought as I looked at it. Just then some green text displayed in a box over the head. It said **[Bob]** as if identifying the head.

I looked to the dead guy beside me. **[Dipshit]** was displayed above his, er, bloody mass where a head used to be. I was certain now, with my vast knowledge of fantasy tropes, that he had been trying some sort of binding shit on me. For all I know, he had been about to order me to clean the toilets for all eternity. *Oh my god, I don't think there are toilets here.* I never considered this aspect of things. You never see the mighty heroes with their golden armor and fancy winged helms taking a squat behind a bush. It makes me wonder how many battles were lost due to wiping with poison oak.

I would think that I would be more shocked, but to be honest I was excited. That seemed strange.

"Hello, book and sludge person or people, are you there still?" I said into the darkness.

"Yes, I'm here," replied a high-pitched female voice.

I assume I have you to thank for getting my memories back. I thought this instead of saying it this time, seeing if it would respond.

I saw what can only be described as a death fairy enter my view. It was oddly two-dimensional and appeared at the corner of my vision as if it were one of those in-app popups.

"Yes, I did bring back what I could, but these aren't all of your memories. But we have more important things to

discuss."

It flew into view as if it were a poorly animated flash movie and sat on the **[Bob]** tag as if it were tired.

I examined it closer. It was wearing a hood that covered its face with two glowing green eyes showing in the darkness. Its wings were similar in shape to a butterfly's but were definitely made of screaming souls. It was wearing a black robe with arcane symbols, skulls, and bones lining it.

It made a mock coughing gesture as if to get my attention.

"I've calmed you down a bit, as you seemed a little too freaked out to talk there for awhile," it said.

"Wait, you what!?" I didn't like the idea that this thing had some sort of control over me.

It waved its little hands in a placating gesture "Don't panic! You have a lot of pretty terrifying things to take in all at once."

I thought about slapping the fairy. "Wah!" it yelled in a shrill voice as it was swatted off the **[Bob]** tag and fell to the bottom of my view. "Please, no violence!"

It shook its head and hands furiously, obviously exasperated.

"All right." I said. "What's happening?"

It calmed down, adjusted its robes, and stood up before speaking. "Let's start with your body. I'm sure you've noticed it isn't what you're used to."

I nodded. It continued. "Do you know what a flesh golem is?"

I thought about it. I knew what a golem was — an artificial construct, usually elemental. If it's anything like some of the games I've played, it will have an obvious glowing weakness like a power core that keeps it moving. But flesh... the thought sent shivers up my spine. Ew.

"Yeah, that," the fairy said. "Basically, a flesh golem is something like a necromancer's ongoing project. It's just something he cobbles together when he doesn't have

enough viable parts for a zombie, which is a much easier and cheaper thing to create. The practitioner would just start with a soul prison. A soul prison is something like a clear gem or a piece of amber. Sometimes it can be created from bodies themselves by crystallizing the blood and using that as a prison, though that limits it specifically to the body it's currently trapped in and must be exchanged for a better one before it dissolves. In a pinch, a severed head makes a great soul prison, but it's inconvenient to carry that around."

I nodded along, head spinning and arms crossed, trying to understand more.

The fairy — which I had decided was female — looked at me as if to check that I was still paying attention.

"Well, in your case your soul prison just happens to be the crystallized ichor of a forgotten elder god. This 'dipshit' as you have labeled him likely had no idea what he had, given what he made your body out of."

"So what am I made out of?" I asked as I looked down at my arms.

The fairy looked at me nervously. "Keep in mind I didn't make you, so don't take it out on me. Your head and torso are mostly ghoul parts. You have the arms of a rock troll and the legs and lower body of some random guy."

I blinked several times at the explanation.

"You have a way with words." I told her. "So, what does all this mean?"

"Well, the ghoul parts are the distressing ones. Ghouls have no souls of their own. They have to consume flesh regularly, eating what's left of the soul energy inside. They are to zombies what zombies are to people... and, well, also what ghouls are to people and everything else. Without soul energy they just hibernate until something living comes near."

She looked away. I could tell she was hiding something.

"What about this crystallized elder god-thing core?" I asked.

"I see you also have a way with words," she replied.

"It's a fraction of a god that has died. Let me scan your memories a bit and try to explain it in a better way." The fairy looked perplexed for a moment, then a turning hourglass showed above her head for a few seconds. *I'm pretty sure this fairy is fucking with me here*, I thought.

The hourglass stopped and she replied. "You know that Cthulhu thing? Yeah, that, but more shadow and less tentacle. You know, I was actually part of a god once, too. That's why I accepted you as a Master; something about you feels familiar. Also, your soul may have been kind of Blended with what was left of the god's soul — just a tad! Gods tend to leave some part of themselves behind just in case all their followers get wiped out and they become forgotten. That's usually how they die. The dark ones have it all the harder, as their followers aren't exactly popular in the first place, and death gods... I mean, who likes dying? Yeah, their followers are definitely toast."

She paused and I finally got the chance to get a word in.

"So I'm a possessed, rock-punching, corpse-eating, regular-dude-pants-wearing, god-hearted guy?"

She smiled, or at least I think that's what it was, as I saw a gleam under the hood. She replied. "Pfft, no, not at all."

"How's that?" I asked.

"It's just some crystallized ichor, not his whole heart. And you can use whatever parts you want when you come across them. If you don't want to have a certain part, all you have to do is kill something and use the power of its soul to fuse it with yourself," she replied matter-of-factly.

I stared off into space for a bit. Several thoughts went through my head. If this really was a fantasy world, I would be able to adapt to anything if given the parts and time. Dragon wings, centaur legs, goblin farts, whatever I wanted — provided I could kill it or find a not-too-decomposed corpse with the bit I needed. I started to smile and laugh to myself.

"You have no idea how creepy that actually is with ghouls teeth, do you?" the fairy said with a shiver.

"What about you? What or who are you?" I finally asked.

"I am a book. I don't remember much about my creation, being blank at the time and all. But I remember my objective well. I gradually take the soul of whomever wants to read me, and in return I provide all the knowledge of the souls that are a part of myself. Basically I contain the wisdom and experiences of thousands of lifetimes and share it with my reader until they die, then I get their wisdom and so on. All with the goal of bringing all this to my Master when he returns."

The fairy was looking me dead in the eyes.

"And I am your Master?" I asked.

The fairy nodded and replied. "Yes, but I cannot give you everything all at once. I've already tried that, and all you did was roll around on the floor, grab your head and pass out, only to repeat the pattern when you woke up — hence the calming spell I placed on you."

"Then have you failed with me? Are you going to take my soul?" I asked worriedly.

"No, and no. I came up with an idea after reading your memories — something like an RPG interface with leveling so I can introduce souls and their skills to you gradually, since you can't handle them all at once. I figured doing it this way would allow you to test things out and get used to using different types of skills and abilities while your god half-merges more with your consciousness." She said in a happy tone.

That was great! I was excited about this, but I wasn't sure how much of that was me. Was it this book altering my emotions, or the dead elder god merging into my soul? That gave me pause. I would always be a monster, so dealing with humans, elves, dwarves, gnomes, and catgirls would become next to impossible, and that's assuming they even

exist here. Maybe there was some sort of disguise magic I could use.

"Book." I said. "Am I able to use magic?"

"In a way, but you are a flesh golem, not a mage. With my help you can, but it will use your souls up and deplete your future gains, as you lack any mana generation. Even if you find a way around this limitation, since it's going through me and I have been possessed almost exclusively by evil people, odds are that the magic will be dark — soul or death magic. I would recommend using only soul magic for a while, as you can actually use a victim's own soul as the source rather than any of ours. Look at Bob there. That's how he was created. That green flame is Bob's soul burning. It likely won't go out for a hundred years or so. Souls can be quite potent, you know. That's actually what draws many wizards, hedge mages and witches to necromancy in the first place. They don't have the mana to compete with the big boys and need to find an alternate source of power."

She fell silent with a shrug.

"Is there any disguise magic?" I asked.

"Yes, of course. But magic here is different than in your games; there are no set spells unless you attend an academy or join an army that teaches the same techniques to everybody. But using soul magic that way would be a little more difficult, as you would need a victim. Nothing says I'm not normal like carrying around a severed head, unless you're a barbarian, but the green flames would still give you away. However, you are a flesh golem! You could always just kill a normal-enough-looking guy and move your core into him, although you would give up your advantages that way, which leads me to..." She paused for dramatic effect.

"Your current skills," she finished.

Chapter 4: Skills — John

Icons started appearing in the edges of my vision. I saw three icons to the left. One was a multi-fanged smiley face, one was a bag, and one was a scroll.

To the right I saw a red bar and a green bar with a number in it: 2,314. I automatically assumed that was my soul gauge, and the red one was obviously health.

Yeah, very minimal. This was definitely created with me in mind, as it all felt very natural and intuitive. At the same time there was something strange about it, like it was made in a hurry.

I thought of a cursor and one appeared. I mentally clicked the fanged smiley. It opened up to reveal a character sheet. There was a body in the middle. Its arms and legs stretched out to four corners of a box with a dotted line separating the arms, legs, head, and torso — something similar to what a normal equipment screen would look like. This screen, however, did not have equipment slots but rather part slots.

I figured the slots were probably a simplistic way to select new parts to add to myself, though I imagined if I wanted extra arms, wings, or something, then the appropriate slot would show up as if it had always been there. I felt like this screen was bloated and unnecessary, like it was only there because I expected it to be there. It hit me again how natural all this felt, and not only because I had played hundreds of RPGs. Strangely, I already knew what everything was. I suspected the book had a way of transferring information directly into me at a trickle. It must have devised this as a time saver.

I left that screen and clicked one of the tabs that was wreathed in green flame. Skills showed up at the top, and I

guessed that this was where I would go to view my already acquired skills.

Blend

Soul Steal

Feast

Blend had a green flame circling around it, so I knew I would have to use it first. I decided to briefly check out the other skills.

I hovered my cursor over *Soul Steal*.

Soul Steal:

This is often the first spell a necromancer learns. However, due to the nature of your core, it costs no mana, and is thereby a skill. It allows the user to perceive and obtain a soul from a corpse. In the case of the undead, the soul must be unbound.

Warning: When used with Soul Channeling on a soul from a distant plane, a sustained effort must be maintained for as long as it takes to force the soul into submission before attempting to use or bind it.

This skill usually requires the use of a soul prison or the head of the soul's original owner for storage. However, your core is an exception and can contain a functionally endless number of souls, negating this requirement.

Well that's awesome, let's check out feast.

Feast:

This is the first skill you learned here. This skill was likely imbued to you by way of possessing mostly ghoulish organs.

It allows you to consume even the most rotten of flesh and passively heal your wounds. The more damaged you are, the stronger the urge to feast. The contents of your stomach are stored as materials you may use for Fleshcrafting and used automatically for mending damages.

Ah, this must have been activated on its own, since Dipshit was a terrible surgeon.

Finally I hovered my cursor over the first item, simply titled *Blend*.

A description popped up.

Blend:

This skill naturally draws on the flesh golem's innate ability of Fleshcrafting and combines it with the book's knowledge of physiology to Blend all the uneven and/or mismatched parts of the body into a homogeneous form, evening out symmetry and gaining a solid skin color and appearance based on the parts used and the availability of parts in the proximity including skin, muscle, etc. to create a normal-as-possible appearance and function as chosen when the skill is used: Beauty, Strength, Speed, etc. on a genetic level.

Warning: When using this skill, in order to achieve best results please have an abundance of possible materials available or results may be less than ideal.

I clicked on the skill to see more options. A 3D rendering of my current body was displayed in a rotatable, zoomable way with two options available: Choose Style and Start or Cancel.

I looked at my body. It was rough — a face not even a mother could love, let alone nurse. My eyes were beady, black specks sunken deep into my skull. I had no nose to speak of, though the bone structure and nose holes were there.

The most dominant feature seemed to be the mouth taking up more than half of the over-sized head. The chin wasn't very prominent. The width of the mouth was rimmed with withered lips, which were straining to keep in the serrated blades it had for teeth inside. The skin around my mouth and jaws was thin and tight, practically showing the teeth and bones right through it.

There was no hair anywhere on my head, not even eyebrows. The skin on the head and torso had thick, rough-looking, green blotches everywhere, likely lichen and other types of mold.

The arms were large muscular things, definitely feeling out of place on this body. They were coated in grey skin with tufts of fur sprouting out from the shoulders and elbows. It was obvious that this rock troll was in a bad state when Dipshit found it. The arms were missing skin here and there and had stitches throughout them, roughly keeping them together. The hands were, as I already knew, huge, and the knuckles looked deadly.

Normal Guy's lower half was displayed here without pants, and I can honestly say 'normal' did not apply here, my god — or my *me*, I suppose. He must have been blessed by the porn gods of this world. The legs were very muscular, definitely someone who had spent his life in hard labor, as he had bulky thigh and calf muscles and large, high-arched feet. The skin was pinkish-white as you might expect on any villager of European descent — not that Europe was a thing here.

After seeing this, I decided I would use a skill, but materials were an issue. Sure, I had Dipshit just a few feet away, rotting on the floor. But he alone would not have all the skin necessary to cover the outside of the monstrosity I seemed to be. So what to do?

Ah, yes, my snack store, AKA **[Dipshit]**'s part stockpile. Though mostly too rotten for these purposes, if I added it all together it would provide enough fresh materials. I stood up and dragged the body over to the stockpile and sat down amid the delicious parts.

Yeah, I was definitely still under the calming effect of the book. It felt like being drunk. I clicked Choose Style and Start. I chose Strength, as with my current parts, speed and beauty would by no means help.

My eyes glossed over and the book took control of my movements. I was only vaguely aware of what was happening, but what followed was a series of flaying and absorption. The book then began shifting and moving my parts and muscles.

When I was again in control of myself I pulled up the Blend skill to get a look at my new body. The skin covering my body would look almost Caucasian if it weren't for a pale gray tinge that I guessed was partly rock troll and partly other sources. But at least now it was uniform. There were no stitches to speak of, and I still lacked hair, but at least I had eyebrows and the barest semblance of a nose.

The skin around my mouth was thicker now, and the outline of teeth could no longer be seen through it. The teeth were still there, but now, provided I didn't smile, they could be concealed.

The muscle had been stacked and layered throughout my body. I now had a six-pack — no, an eight-pack of abs. My shoulders had been broadened to accommodate the arm structure a little better and give me a more human shape. The leg bones had been lengthened to match the length of the arms and provide a more balanced impression. I guessed my height now must be between 6'5" and 7'. Yep, definitely still not human, but perhaps now I wouldn't be shot on sight.

I moved around a bit, feeling how effortless everything was. I tried doing push-ups, jumping jacks and sit-ups; all seemed to be doable without any real effort.

I noticed now that without much conscious thought the interface would disappear if I wasn't thinking of using it, but I could still feel it as if it were there. I supposed it wasn't actually anything visual but something happening in my mind.

The fairy walked out from behind the skills window and started to speak.

"So, what do you think? Pretty awesome, huh?"

I could tell from her happy tone that she was fairly proud of herself.

"It's not bad. I still feel like a resident of Innsmouth or a crappy batman villain, though." I replied.

I really was surprised by the quality of the work, but at its core, or *my* core, I supposed, it made me realize just how inhuman I was.

The fairy laughed proudly, thrusting her little chest out. "You have no idea how hard that was considering what we had to work with here. Well, I won't linger. You still have your Abilities tab to look through. I'll be waiting if you have any questions." The fairy again walked behind the window.

Alright then, I still had two more skills, Soul Steal and Feast, to try, but it was obvious that the fairy wanted me to check out abilities first. I tapped on the abilities tab. It only had two entrees.

[Abilities]

Fleshcrafting

Soul Infusion

Fleshcrafting was wreathed with green flame, letting me know that it was the one I was supposed to click — so of course I hovered over Soul Infusion first.

Soul Infusion:

An ability granted by your elder-god core.

A soul in storage may be infused into an object, either giving it the soul's attributes and sentience or causing it to complete a predetermined function.

Additional levels may make the actions more complex or allow you to infuse multiple souls into one object for a more powerful result.

Soul Infusion may also be used to disassemble, combine or otherwise alter souls in your inventory.

Interesting, but I didn't quite understand it.

I hovered my cursor over Fleshcrafting.

Fleshcrafting:

The ability to manipulate flesh freely into any form or shape one wishes.

At current level you can only affect your own flesh or flesh that has been grafted to your body. This process takes hours or even days for bigger changes.

At high levels you may even be able to quickly manipulate the flesh of your enemies, provided they are not magically protected. At the mid levels you can make split second changes to your own form. This skill is mainly seen in flesh golems at higher levels.

"Hey, fairy." I called.

The fairy once again walked around from the side of the window.

"Yes, Master," she said as if doing an Igor impression.

I fought the urge to roll my eyes.

"Can Fleshcrafting be used for regeneration or instant healing?" I asked.

The fairy replied, "Yes, of course! But at your current level it will take some time. You can heal in a few minutes what it takes a normal person a few months to do naturally, provided you have the materials. Cuts and things like that won't hurt you much as long as they don't hit your core, but fire, acid, and many magical attacks could still kill you before you could even start mending. Oh, and beware of priests and healers! If they throw a resurrection spell on you, you may die instantly, or at best be unable to use Fleshcrafting again for some time. You see, resurrection attempts to return your soul to your body, which happens to be long gone."

"So if I understand correctly, as it currently stands a slime could kill me quicker than a fully armed knight?"

"Not quite; all a knight would have to do is drive a sword, lance, spear, sharpened stick or any number of sharp pointies through your chest and rupture your core, and you would die. The slimes of this world aren't the cute jello

mold-like creatures you're thinking about. They are usually bigger than horses and tend to envelope and smother things before digesting them. But they take a lot longer to digest than you would think. And given that you don't really need to breathe, you could probably just walk right out of there, or even use Fleshcrafting on it by absorbing it and turning it into gross slime-skin or tentacles or something."

She continued. "And without further ado, I present you with this gift." She raised her hands in the air and a number 1 floated from them up to a new heading that said Ability Points.

"Since you used Blend, your body is a little more stable, and you can handle some more power. Powering you up is kinda my thing, you know," she said. "Now then, all this talk of your Weaknesses makes me realize you need to create some defenses. and you have a pile of possible additions here. I would recommend putting that point into Fleshcrafting and making yourself a little something to help you out."

She was obviously going through this song and dance just to get me used to the leveling system she'd created. What was this, a tutorial?

But who was I to argue with an ancient, evil book with lifetimes of wisdom under its belt? Plus, I didn't know what the other ability was all about yet, but I instinctively knew it wasn't anything combat-oriented. I was still a bit surprised knowing that just about anyone could kill me if they got in a lucky shot, and I had zero defenses against steel at the moment, making me feel squishy and vulnerable. I decided to listen to the fairy and tapped the new icon that appeared beside Fleshcrafting. A new line formed under the description.

Fleshcrafting Level 2

Fleshcrafting speed is increased.

You may affect the things you are in direct contact with. This is a much slower process than something

which is a part of you. It can also be used to make flesh constructs. However, the more complicated the creation the longer it will take to make.

After thinking for a bit I decided I would attempt to make a weapon. I mentally clicked on Fleshcrafting to activate it, and something kind of like a design mode started.

The fairy popped out again.

"I tried to think of a way to change your perception of time a bit to make this all easier. Since you don't need to eat or drink, this shouldn't impact you negatively. I will also be helping you passively with things like mathematics and symmetry while you create things here."

Without another word, she simply popped back out of existence.

My first thought was a femur club. I gathered the legs and leg bones around me into a pile and extracted eight femurs and a pelvis. I began combining the bones together instinctively, extracting the marrow as I went. I smoothed and lengthened the object. A club just didn't feel quite right. If I was investing this kind of time, I needed more to show for it than something that would become obsolete when I found a sword or something later. Still, I couldn't think of anything too complex at the moment.

I tried smoothing the bone into more of a sword shape, but that didn't feel right, either. I thought about ancient cultures and remembered something from the Mayans.

I would make a macuahuitl, which was something like a large wooden paddle with obsidian blades attached to the sides.

I changed my greatsword shape into a flat surface resembling a cricket bat with the paddle surface stretching out to about five feet, leaving the handle at the one-foot mark.

But what to do about the blades? I couldn't shape rock. I thought for several minutes. Ah, yes, teeth! Teeth can be sharp, and enamel is harder than normal bone. I extracted

as many teeth as I could from what was lying around and shaped them all uniformly into small jagged points. I then attached them to the sides of my weapon. This way when one broke off into an opponent the rest would still be there for the remainder of the battle. Simply adding one back would probably not take me too long.

I looked at my work. It was something truly menacing to behold. It looked like a cross between a macuahuitl and a sawfish snout, but I felt like I could do more. I condensed the bone into itself several times, increasing its strength and density. While my paddle shrank slightly, it was still massive.

I mentally clicked the Done button.

I held my new weapon. It was around six inches wide and about five-and-a-half feet long. I was glad I took strength as my Blend option — this thing had some serious heft to it.

I ripped up the robes worn by Dipshit to make a harness to hold it, as I knew the garment wouldn't fit me. Honestly, I just wanted to destroy something he had cherished. I still hated him. I didn't know if it was me or the elder god in me, but I knew I would always hate those who tried to control me — those who in some way thought themselves my superiors. I would not be controlled; I would not be contained. The thought of another being holding itself above me made me sick, and I drifted into thought.

I will rule them all. Every other being will be simply my stepping stone. I am the end. Not even a god may fight death in this world. No sun nor star may overcome the darkness forever. Eventually, there will be only me, older than all. They may outshine me for a time, but I will always be present and as — what the hell am I thinking? I am okay. I am me and no one else.

I took several deep breaths to center myself. Wow, this god had a major inferiority complex. I felt a kinship; I had been glanced over my entire life. Early on I had tried my hardest at everything, but I was never recognized simply

because I didn't *look* capable of anything great. Others always took credit for my ideas and passed them off as their own. Just because they were attractive or seemed smart or cute. They always got what they wanted, while I was left with nothing.

I had what was, for lack of a better term, resting bitch face. It made me seem unapproachable. People would often imagine the worst emotions or motivations behind anything I did. It was another reason I hated people — another reason my digital self was so much more real to me.

In games, I was just another player. My avatar could smile while I was crying inside. The game would persist even when my world was crumbling around me. Spend money to live, live to make money. Truly, that world was broken, and I wanted nothing more than to break it all apart. I would embrace this god; he and I knew the truth of it all: that in the end, life is about the struggle, and to win we must crush all the false prophets smiling deceptive smiles with a shiny coin in one hand to tempt and a dagger in the other concealed behind their backs waiting to strike.

I would kill all those who claimed their truth in gold, those who claimed to be superior by birth or fortune. Those who claimed the world was theirs by right. The only certainty is death, is nothing, is me. There is only nothing. Everything else is a temporary illusion strung together by false beliefs.

I am the absolute certainty, the final end to all things.

I laughed, my cackling voice scraping my throat, my voice abnormally loud. My very life was ebbing away into the ether. I felt my mind crack, splintering into nothing. I held my thoughts together with the strength of my willpower alone. I gradually regained myself. *Jeez, I think I might have some issues here.*

I don't know how much of that was me and how much of that was the brewing resentment of the elder god dwelling within my soul.

I knew that from here on I had to think of nothing but puppies and kittens or else I could lose myself. I sensed that if the elder god ever regained his memories I might cease to be. The very power of his existence could overwrite me and everything I was.

But I also knew that we were fused now. We were one being, and if I could only show him that there was more to life than deception and strife, then he may wait a while before ending it all.

Like me, he wished to know more of existence, to feel more. A meal prepared with love, slowly savored to the last morsel, would make consuming it that much more satisfying. This world didn't know it yet, but I would consume it all. And maybe my old world could use a little enlightenment then, too.

I felt my wanderlust renew. I was ready to take this world for all it had.

The fairy jumped out again, killing my momentum.

"Wait! I still have more to give you!" she said, her body forming an X shape. "I give you three languages of this world, since no one here speaks English."

She brought her hands together as if in prayer, then parted them once more. "You now know Therossian, Forestkin, and Goblin. These are the most common languages in this area."

"Well, that's certainly convenient, thanks, but I would really like to get going now. Is there anything else?" I said with a touch of annoyance in my voice.

The fairy pretended to think for a moment and finally said, "Yes, don't forget about your other two icons. The backpack is inventory, but you don't have any dimensional compartments or space magic, so it's basically just a list of what you have. You'll mainly use it to manage and interact with the souls you take. The scroll icon is a list of tasks and quests that will be populated as you interact with people and things in this world. I will also try to help you by adding

quests that I think you might benefit from, to make you stronger or acquire cool things."

The fairy gestured to the other two icons. I mentally clicked on the backpack icon.

[Rag harness]

This harness was quickly and poorly constructed from a novice necromancer's robe. It seems to be held together merely by the power of wishful thinking but should provide something your weapon can hang from.

Effect: Minor raised efficiency with Soul Steal due to the nature of the materials.

[Great Bone Macuahuitl]

Made of reinforced bone, you believe this weapon may even stand up to steel swords for a time.

Effect: Higher chance of intimidation.

[Normal Guy Pants]

Made of a threadbare grey fabric. There is nothing spectacular about these pants except that they are still in one piece.

[Souls]

You have not yet stolen any souls, and you are not using mine.

I closed the inventory and clicked on the scroll.

[New Quest]

Get souls!

Use Soul Steal and acquire some souls to play around with!

Rewards: Souls

Consequences if refused: No souls, and the book will hate you.

I closed the scroll.

"So... you won't let me use your souls?" I asked.

"I've already explained this to you. Most of the souls in me are smart, powerful, or at least magical, excluding a few

goblins and curious fools. They are better if transferred to you when your soul can accept them without you losing yourself. Imagine having all the knowledge and power of so many lifetimes. You would be able to Master every sort of magic, learn every skill and martial art, or even make a goblin pie. The knowledge within also allows me to help you more, so in effect you would just be making yourself dumber. Plus, it's not like you even know what to do with those souls anyway, so why do you care? Go find your own souls to play around with."

She waved away the green soul bar, setting it to zero.

"This ends the tutorial. I'll still be around for any questions on skills or anything I feel you need to know, but you will have to start figuring out things on your own. That's the best way to get stronger, you know!"

Some fireworks that blossomed into green screaming skulls shot up into the air and the fairy dissipated, leaving me alone in the quiet darkness of the cave.

I took a few minutes to psych myself up again and walked out of the cave into the brightness outside. For some reason, I felt as if something was tugging at me to go in a certain direction. It was just nice to be out of the cave!

Huh, it's still sunny out here. I doubt this is still the same day, considering all that has happened. Maybe I've been here for a few days, maybe a week.

I looked around. I was in the mountains, surrounded by a peppering of mighty evergreen trees. I inhaled deeply and looked up to the sky. I felt a thud, then pain. I looked down. *Huh, when did I get the ability to grow branches? Wait, no this is definitely an arrow. When did I get the ability to grow arrows? Shit! There's an arrow sticking out of my stomach. I felt another thud, this time in my neck.*

My mind reeled. *What if this unseen attacker hit my core? Should I charge them? No, the arrows came from different directions. Should I run back into the cave? No, that would only stall for time, and they would just camp*

here and wait, or maybe even gather together and invade, blocking me in.

So I did the only thing I could think of. I held a hand up into the air in a mimic of death and fell on my back with an exaggerated scream.

Chapter 5: Corruption — Thadeus

"Sir, I've brought your ale."

The man placed it on the table and scurried off without waiting for a reply.

I may have gone overboard with my display the other day, but it's important that they fear me — though to be honest it's not like I didn't enjoy it. Hearing her screams, feeling her spirit break under me as her blood ran down my thighs.

I was always the Duke's best torturer.

Unlike the others, I always got results, though it was true that by the end they would agree to anything whether it was true or not. Thinking back on it, a shiver of pleasure ran down my spine. I licked my lips thinking about it.

My name is Thadeus Roangard. I am a noble from one of the oldest houses in Theross. Our standing with the king is less than favorable, however, and I am the fourth son, so I was given to the clergy along with a sizable donation when I turned twelve as a gesture to improve my family's standing with the church.

My family had long been known as followers of Rosereth. The problem was that the King was a devout follower of Therossa. After a time, I realized a funny thing about the churches: the stories were all the same, and the descriptions of events were mostly the same. The key difference was that Rosereth was depicted as an elven maiden, and Therossa was a human angel. So long ears or wings, human or not — that was it. The King felt that humans should worship humans, despite the fact that he himself was rumored to have some elven blood in his ancestry, affording him an impressive magical strength.

My time at the church would be the worst time of my existence. I was stripped of my title and rights to my

ancestral home. I was made to serve the priests in every way. I was whipped for any mistake, no matter how small. I was used in ways that I will never forgive them for and forced to warm their beds, as they were not allowed to take wives.

The head priest, Barneth, was the worst. Simply warming his bed wasn't enough for him; he was too old and twisted for that. Over time he had developed a certain cruelty that he had nurtured in private rooms at late hours. He would bind me with rough rope and beat me to the precipice of death, only to heal my wounds like it never happened and send me on my way with a warm smile.

I learned to heal from him. His lessons were worked into my body, and my soul still bears the scars.

What had my parents expected? They must have known that I would not be treated kindly as a former follower of Rosereth.

In just four years, Barneth had lost interest in me, sending me to the Duke. The kingdom was in turmoil at the time, and the King had suspected that his brother may have plans to usurp him. The Duke had many enemies and spies that he needed answers from. I was all too happy to get them.

How I enjoyed my work. Men, women, and children, no matter who, no matter how young or old, I would take them apart piece by piece until the answers flowed as freely as their blood.

In just a few years, my infamy with the public had grown as the families of my victims saw the state their loved ones were in during their trial. But the Duke was overjoyed. Now people weren't just afraid of the convictions in court — they were afraid of even becoming suspects.

Soon, the gold offered for becoming a spy could not match the terror of getting caught. The Duke faced no open opposition and was given the right to govern his Duchy without the King's interference. A quiet time came over the

Duchy and there was no longer much work for me. Most people who were arrested for a crime would plead guilty before interrogation. They feared the torture more than the swift death granted by the headsman.

The Duke now only had one problem: his son Roswelt. Roswelt had a bit of a rebellious streak and hated his father. He loved his uncle, however, since most of his early childhood had been spent with the King in the capital itself. He was made a ward to deter his father from carrying out any schemes.

The Duke only got him back when his opponents had a change of heart. It was likely related to having family in the Duchy who were just one false accusation away from a fate far worse than death.

The Duke's son would send letters to the king describing the meetings and goings-on within the Duchy. Of course, none of them ever left, and a false reply was given back, thanking him for his reports.

Roswelt would do anything he could to attempt to undermine his father's position and generally made a fool of himself in the attempt. I once had started a rumor that he was overly fond of the drink and would spout half-truths in high-class whorehouses.

Most recently, Roswelt had been trying to undermine his father's future prospects by marrying a commoner, all to avoid a political marriage that could strengthen the Duchy and place one of the Duke's supporters in his bed to control him. Of course, failing that, should a son be produced, an accident could be arranged for Roswelt, and the Duke's line would be secured.

No woman in the Duchy would ever consider marrying Roswelt after the first few were accused of being spies and tortured publicly. The rest would simply avoid him by any means necessary.

Finally, Roswelt had gone to the merchant guild and placed an announcement offering that any beautiful young

maiden could come from outside the Duchy and be considered a candidate to be his wife after a courtship period to establish trust.

He also offered to pay the wedding dowry simply for making the trip. He likely did this for two reasons: first because of the risk involved, and second because he was spending his father's money hand over fist this way. A contract with the merchant guild had been struck, and the Duke could not decline it without losing some social status by seeming financially weak or even looking as though he was severely hurting trade within the Duchy, as the merchant guild controlled all the importing and exporting of goods with their contacts and supply lines.

The Duke had a simple plan. He recruited a former general of the conquered Garanth Empire who had no love for the king and could at any time raise a group of street scum, deserters, and cutthroats. I was to act as his pet healer and go by the name 'Thads' so as to keep any connection to the Duke a secret.

He ordered us south, our only goal to stop the girls and recover Roswelt's dowries. All but thirty percent went back to the Duke, as I am in charge of divvying out the coin.

Anyone who argues gets my special treatment. The girls are just the perks, to be shared however I deem fit after I am done.

I make a public showing of my skills then turn them over to be used by the men. I keep one alive only until we get the next one.

The men remain complacent, having seen a live showing of what fate awaits them should they argue or get any ideas about mutiny or desertion. Of course, the truly dark-hearted ones get their thirsts sated while at the same time keeping the worst of their urges under control.

To decrease the possibility of a girl getting through, and to increase the length of my assignment and my number of victims, I had come up with an idea. First, I would have all

the coachmen in the area who weren't on retainer with the merchant guild spread rumors about Roswelt's cruelty and murderous lust. Then they were to inform the girls that they could escape their terrible fate with a little silver to boot.

The coachman was then to take the girls directly to our main camp and drop them off, silver in hand.

By doing this, the coachmen would halve their trips and get more weight in their coin pouches.

When I got there after reclaiming the Duke's coin from the merchant carriages, I would be the girls' white knight, taking their coin and granting them safety — for all of two minutes before reducing them to sobbing lumps of meat.

This last coachman had been doing this for us a long time. I guess there was something different about this girl, something that made him want to save her.

That fool. I always plan for every contingency.

The main road had deep trenches dug into it, guiding anything with wheels to the side at a sharp angle.

The merchants and villagers who would go through this part regularly got only an unpleasant set of bumps, maybe a broken wheel or injured horse. But if you happened to go at full speed, the horses and carriages would almost certainly topple, and our archers would then make short work of them. Any fools just traveling at full speed were simply robbed for extra profits and, most importantly, killed for fun.

"Sir, I'm sorry to disturb you, but she's in pretty bad shape right now. I may have gone too far this time." A cutthroat had approached me, still tying his pants, his hands dripping blood onto the ground.

I smiled. How long had it been since I used a resurrection spell? Killing her a few times might make me feel a little better after trudging up old memories.

Chapter 6: Soul Steal — John

I lay there, hoping my Oscar-worthy death performance had achieved the desired effect. My heart beat furiously in my chest, but I mentally stopped it. It was a strange thing to do, but it felt natural. Basically I was switching modes from the living to the undead. It had only been a short while, but I felt like it had been a lifetime.

I eventually heard shuffling from the bushes.

A loud shrill voice called out, "I think this thing dead!"

Another slightly deeper voice called out, "You sure? This thing look tough!"

The first voice replied, "You heard scream; this thing not move in while, either."

"Yeah, this thing look like it not breathe now," the second voice said, now sounding closer.

"You think this was 'cause of big screaming howls from cave all day?" the first voice said, now just a few feet away.

"Maybe thing sick. Look at skin," the second voice said standing over me.

"It stink! Smell like death. We no eat," the first voice said, now also standing over me.

It was a strange language, mainly composed of chirps and growls, almost all vowels except for the occasional B, G, or K sound. Yep, this was definitely Goblin. Could they really be goblins? I was about to meet a fantasy creature for the first time! True, I would be murdering them, but it was my first step to a fantasy confrontation in a new world!

"What rags those? Glow green, we no touch," the second voice said.

"Look at pants. Pants not bad," the first voice said as if swallowing.

"Pants look stupid. Pants too big. Why you always take pants?" the second voice said with a touch of suspicion.

"Me like pants. What you have 'gainst pants?" said the first voice defensively.

"We not wear pants! You ever see gob in pants?" the second argued with slight aggravation in its voice.

"I take pants off now." The first voice said, now showing a hint of excitement as if looking forward to something.

"No! You never keep pants after taking off! Me think you have problem!" the second voice shouted.

My pants were pulled down in a swift practiced motion.

"Wow!" the first voice exclaimed excitedly.

"That too big for use! Why you keep looking?" the second voice said with a hint of bitterness.

All this attention to my crotch had an unforeseen effect.

"It getting bigger!" the first voice squealed in delight.

Yeah, this is totally not what I had in mind for my first goblin encounter.

"No! It big enough!" the second voice said with a bit of panic.

I was now at full mast. My heart wasn't beating. Was this the fairy's doing? I would strangle her later! Though it had been some time since I'd gotten laid... What the hell was I thinking?

"You go now, check cave for others! I stay here make sure I, er, you not disturbed," the first voice said, some desperation leaking through.

"Okay! Okay, I go, but first take this as trophy!" the second voice said as I felt a blade on my shaft.

This had gone on long enough. If ever there were a sign I should act now, this was it.

I opened my eyes and grabbed the wrist holding the offending blade and twisted it, breaking it like a couple of dried twigs. I must protect Normal Guy's pride! I heard a scream of sheer shock. I grabbed its throat and squeezed until I felt it give.

"Nooo!" the first voice screamed and dived back while knocking an arrow to a bow.

I threw the now limp body of goblin number two at the first goblin, knocking it over in a crash of limbs. I went to run and promptly tripped on my pants, falling flat on my face and driving both arrows deeper into my flesh.

The goblin quickly retrieved its bow and started backpedaling.

I rose to my feet and performed a mighty bunny hop, landing about a meter away from the terrified goblin. I swiftly swung my weapon, ripping the rag harness, and sloppily decapitated it. The head rolled right in front of me, its eyes looking one last time at my crotch before the light faded from them.

Not what I expected my first battle to be like. I pulled up my pants, awkwardly tucking things away.

I guess goblin number one died doing what it loved.

I pulled out the arrows. Damn, these things hurt — not as much as I thought they would, but that may just be the ghoulish parts. Having been formerly undead, they probably weren't the most sensitive. It could also be that I don't feel pain as sharply when I'm in undead mode.

I mentally used Fleshcrafting and focused on mending the damages. After several minutes, I restarted my heart. I sensed I couldn't stay undead too long or things would start to rot again.

I picked up the two goblin bodies and started walking towards the cave. I think these two were the only ones out here, but you never know when something else may show up.

I entered the cave and carried them to the main chamber so Bob could provide us with a little green light.

I looked them over. It was my first time seeing goblins in the flesh, after all. Truth be told, I felt a little bit bad for killing them, but they had definitely started it.

Goblin two had his head and arm flopped to the side at unnatural angles. I looked closer at the head. He still had a look of extreme terror on his face. His features were what I

had expected — long, pointy ears, a long nose, and a mouth filled with jagged, uneven teeth locked in a grimace. He had blotchy, yellow skin. I opened his eyes. Reddish brown. I'm guessing goblins had issues with light sensitivity. They may have been camped out there since night time, as I doubt the sun was pleasant to them. Then again, I was just guessing. Standing up straight, he would be maybe three feet tall. He was skinny with a pot belly indicative of prolonged hunger, long, thin fingers, and large feet.

I looked at goblin one's body. It had the same skin color and a similar build. The only difference I noticed was that it seemed to have slightly wider hips, and slightly more meat on its thighs.

I thought back on their conversation. *I wonder...*

I pulled off both of their loincloths. Yep, goblin one was a gal, but so was goblin number two — wait, nevermind. That poor bastard. I wonder if they were a couple? That might explain some things.

I started to get hard again. What the hell, Normal Guy?! Come to think of it, in all the corpses I've glanced at here, he was one of the only humans that I had seen other than Dipshit, though that part pile was very badly decomposed. Just what the hell had he been doing in goblin territory? I shuddered to think maybe Normal Guy wasn't so normal after all. I saw a mental picture of a middle aged man giving me a thumbs up with an Eric Estrada-esque smile on his face.

But I guess that explains how he likely met his end, as well. Running around a fantasy world trying to hump everything probably wasn't the best survival tactic.

From here on out, Normal Guy will now be known as Perverted Guy, I decided — Pervy Guy for short.

A message flashed in front of my eyes.

*Secret Ability Discovered: **Perversion**.*

I mentally clicked it, and it took me to the ability screen.

I worriedly hovered over it.

Perversion: Passive ability.

Perversion is always active and cannot be canceled.

You will have a compulsion to copulate with any viable being or orifice, possibly even suggestive plants or trees.

You will now get erections in even the most stressful of situations.

By understanding the remnants of the soul of your crotch, you have found common ground and unlocked this ability.

Shit! I knew I shouldn't have played all those monster-girl games! I don't want it!

This was going to be like puberty all over again. Why the hell is this an ability and not a skill? This was learned, right? Did Perverted Guy just have his abnormal tastes from birth or something?

I thought of cutting *it* off and immediately winced. *There's no way. This may not be my original body, but no man would do that. It's basically as important as life itself.* I could always swap it out later, I supposed. *Damnit!*

"Fairy, I know you won't come out unless I have a skill or ability question, but I sure as hell have one!"

The fairy crawled out from the side of my view laughing so hard she couldn't stand. She just rolled toward me, clutching her stomach with green tears streaming from her face while she laughed unapologetically.

"Damnit, Fairy, the hell is this shit?"

She just paused for a second and stood up, trying to make a straight face, then fell back down in another fit of laughter before disappearing.

"Great, really helpful there."

This was pointless. I stared at Bob for a minute, and my crotch gradually returned to normal.

Ah, good old Bob. He was quickly becoming my only friend in this world.

The fairy reappeared, wiping tears from her eyes.

"I think it's a sure bet that Perverted Guy probably had some satyr ancestry, as this is one of their traits. Hell, they practically get hard as a greeting, and you don't even want to know about the handshake. But, you know, satyrs do have some powerful legs, though usually they are goat-like. Perverted Guy's legs are great! Human in shape, and he seems to have gotten all the positive traits with only one negative right between them. I knew this earlier when I helped you with Blend, but I kept quiet about it... and it was totally worth it!" The fairy started cackling again and disappeared in a puff of green, screaming souls.

I felt like the victim of a bad practical joke. *Damn you, Fairy, and damn you again, Dipshit!*

I took several deep breaths. I am still in control. I am still me. I just have to not think about sex or being controlled or controlling others and I will be fine. I wondered if this world had a therapist. I think I need one.

I focused and covered goblin one's nethers with her loincloth.

All right! Lets see what Soul Steal is all about.

I focused on the skill, activating it. My hands burst into green flames as the world lost all color except dark green. I heard a loud screaming right behind me.

"Oh, God, make it stop! This hurts! I'm on fire! Fire! Oh, God!"

I turned around with a start.

It was Bob. I walked up to him as he wailed incoherently and saw a screaming soul flaming in front of his emaciated face. I reached out and took it. The green light in the room stopped, yet I could still see.

*Ability Discovered: **Night Sight***

That was fairly obvious. I waved the notification away. Now that I knew the fairy controlled them, they were meaningless. She could basically write whatever she wanted, true or not.

I didn't think I could take bound souls.

"Fairy, why was I able to take Bob's soul?" I asked.

The fairy appeared with a mischievous grin. "Bob was bound by Dipshit, and when you killed Dipshit, you freed him from his binding, so he's been aware of everything for a while now. He's basically just been burning there in agony since then."

Oh, wow. Poor Bob. At least it's over now though. My soul gauge was now at one.

I looked behind me at the goblins. Goblin two's soul was hovering over his head and nervously looking around. Goblin one's soul was in two pieces. One smaller piece was hovering over her body, while the bigger piece was over her head also just looking around.

I walked over, almost slipping on something. I looked down. Oh, yeah, Dipshit's brains. I saw several fragments of souls there, and I stooped and scooped them all up before reaching out and taking the goblins' souls.

My soul gauge now read 4.

I walked down the passage to the parts pile.

It looked like these had already been picked clean, probably by Dipshit.

I took the remaining fragments of soul from Dipshit's remains.

Quest completed: Get souls!

Rewards: The book's continued approval and the unlocking of tutorial number two.

I mentally opened my inventory. I clicked on the Souls tab.

I saw four entrees.

Soul of a crazed warlock: Wholeness 31%

Soul of a bitter goblin: Wholeness 100%

Soul of a lusty goblin: Wholeness 100%

Soul of a novice necromancer: Wholeness 77%

The fairy walked up beside the displayed souls, now in black and white. She was wearing a beanie propeller hat like

something from a '50s comic or one of those old projector educational videos I had seen in elementary school.

The fairy looked depressed and kicked the non-existent dirt around. I heard a deep warm voice — something like Captain Kangaroo. *God, I'm old.*

The disembodied voice said, "What's wrong, little Timmy?."

The fairy stopped and looked towards me as if I were a camera and said, "Well, gee willikers, mister. I went through all the trouble to get all these souls, but now I don't know what to do with 'em."

The voice responded while an old, upbeat musical score played. "Well, Timmy, souls are a personal thing. As you get older, you may find your soul gauge growing in number and size, but the important thing isn't how large it is — it's all in how you use it."

The fairy looked up. "But how do I use it, mister?"

"Go ahead and open your inventory, you see your souls there?"

"I sure do, mister. What's all this wholeness business about?" Little Timmy said, pointing at the souls.

"Well, that, little Timmy, is the percentage of the soul you were able to retrieve. You see, different souls may be exhausted by use from, say, your friendly neighborhood necromancer turning them into a lamp, or by not being able to find all those pesky little soul-fragments — for instance, if you had splattered their brains everywhere and used their skin to fill in the gaps on yourself," the voice said kindly.

"Boy, did I! Now what do I do?" Timmy asked worriedly.

"Don't worry, Timmy. Just right-click on that pesky necromancer soul, and we'll see our current options." the voice said reassuringly.

I followed along and mentally right-clicked on Dipshit's soul.

I saw three options.

Disassemble: this option breaks apart the soul, allowing you to pick and choose what to take.

Absorb: This option takes in all of a soul, adding its memories and skills to yourself. Warning! May lose sense of self.

Talk: Allows you to talk to a soul.

Absorb was grayed out.

Talk was grayed out.

I gladly clicked on Disassemble. Screw that guy!

The soul split apart into several different categories.

Skills: Noteworthy skills learned over a lifetime.

Magic: Magic learned over a lifetime.

Memories: Their memories.

Personality: Their outlook and reactions.

"Now go ahead and click on Skills, Timmy, and let's see what we can learn." the voice instructed confidently.

I clicked on Skills.

You have learned Tailor level 3.

You have learned Cooking level 1.

You have learned Grave-Robbing level 2.

You have learned Ancient Languages Translation level 2.

Wow, tailor, huh? I guess that's useful.

"Now click on magic! I bet there are all kinds of useful things there."

I clicked on magic.

Soul Steal Add-On: Multiple copies of a single spell will be added to the total level based upon experience.

You have learned Convert to Mana: Souls or soul fragments in your inventory can be directly converted to mana.

You have learned Channel Soul: This allows you to summon a soul from another plane of existence directly into a soul prison. Power of soul and dimension of transfer are random, unless calling upon a specific

plane. Note: Soul Infusion allows you to bypass the use of a soul prison.

You have learned Bind Soul: This allows you to erase all memories of a soul, anchoring it to this plane and binding it to your will. Requires long chant time. The stronger the soul the longer the chant time and higher the mana consumption.

Combine Souls: This allows you to combine souls or soul fragments into one soul. *Note:* This function is already covered by Soul Infusion and will instead add to the total level of Soul Infusion based upon experience.

Due to the nature of your core, all soul spells are added to skills, as they cost you no mana.

Soul Steal Level 2!

Soul Infusion Level 2!

I waved away the notifications.

I had zero desire to gain Dipshit's memories or personality, as those might effect my sense of identity.

"Oh, wow! Mister, I've learned so much from just that one soul!" Little Timmy said.

"Great job, Little Timmy. From here on out, you should try out all the different options and combinations."

A box displayed: *Tutorial 2 now complete.*

The fairy disappeared again, her pinwheeled avatar giving the thumbs up as she faded in a puff of green souls.

I looked vacantly at my Souls screen. Well, okay then. I had no words for that.

Soul of a crazed warlock: Wholeness 31%

Soul of a bitter goblin: Wholeness 100%

Soul of a lusty goblin: Wholeness 100%

Soul of a novice necromancer: Wholeness 77%

I decided I wanted to speak to Bob.

I right-clicked on *Soul of a crazed warlock* and clicked Talk. Bob appeared screaming but gradually stopped.

"Oh, I'm not on fire now. Hello there, boss!" the flaming soul-puff said with a smile, appearing much like the fairy

did, in a 2D form.

"Hello there, Bob!" I said with some enthusiasm.

The soul frowned. "I know not this Bob. I mainly remember being on fire. But since I don't remember my name anymore, I will accept that name with gratitude! I saw what you did to the one you have been calling Dipshit. He deserved it! Because of that, I shall call you Boss!"

"Bob!"

"Boss!"

"Bob!"

"Boss!"

"Bob! You may not realize it, but you have been my only real friend here! Do you have any requests?" I asked in earnest. I would do what I could for this poor, abused soul.

"Boss, please take my magic! My skills were probably laughable, but I think I had magic. Other than that, I have a request I dare not ask of one I owe so much. I wanted the necromancer dead, which you did in a spectacular way. However, my other request is much harder to say."

It was strange that he was speaking English. I felt swept away in Bob's gratitude. He really seemed like a good guy. I also wondered how it was possible that Bob knew about splitting souls and taking skills or magic. Could it be that when I use Soul Steal I actually absorb all of the soul? The book of souls must act as a filter, keeping parts for itself and only letting through what it wants. I figured I wasn't actually speaking to the soul, but rather what the book had put together out of its memories.

"What do you need, Bob? If it's something I can do, I will help you however I can." I said.

"Okay, Boss, just don't think too poorly of me. I always dreamed of killing that bastard myself! My request is that after you take my magic you infuse me into a humanoid flesh construct. Then infuse Dipshit into another one and let me kill him a few hundred times. Then, I will be your humble servant until you see fit to consume me. I won't care

after that. I spent years just burning on this wall! Oh — and make him female, as well," the soul said that last part in a sinister tone.

Yes, Bob was indeed a little messed up. But so was I. The elder-god part of me seemed to crave some additional suffering. It wanted to see more of human nature — see it at its worst as if to confirm its resolution.

I thought about it a bit. How could I grant Bob's request? Well, I had seen the words "flesh construct" many times now. I considered that making one was basically the same as making another flesh golem. That was not an amount of time I was willing to spend — but maybe if I made tiny flesh constructs this wouldn't take too long.

I decided then that my internal sense of justice just could not forgive the fact that Bob had spent years burning just to provide a source of light. I knew Bob was due his revenge, no matter how twisted his request.

I decided to make two action figure-sized flesh constructs.

I dragged the two goblin bodies over to the flesh pile. I initiated Fleshcrafting. The design mode automatically initiated. The first figure I would make female, roughly four inches. I made it female lacking any sort of muscle tone, mostly skin and bone I gave it a fair head of hair and a good-sized set of breasts. It wasn't exactly pretty, however, as I didn't invest a lot of time.

The second figure I made mostly of muscle. I gave it all the correct parts for a male.

I selected the female figure and dragged Dipshit's soul onto it. The figure's face lit up in absolute terror. It immediately began to chant again.

I felt a very slight pulling on my soul. I was reminded of the rage I had felt before. I picked it up in my hand and snapped its neck with my thumb.

How dare he still try to control me. To him now I was a god.

I used Fleshcrafting again, removed the vocal cords and fixed the damage. I infused the soul once more. The female figure tried to speak before attempting to flee.

I grabbed it, holding it in place.

I dragged Bob's soul over the male figure, infusing his memories and personality.

Bob's figurine smiled up at me and gave a strangely graceful bow.

I released the female figure.

I dare not say what happened next. I had to fight the urge to vomit. I had to infuse Dipshit's soul and Fleshcraft the female body back together at least half a dozen times before Bob finally gave me a happy smile and thanked me once more in an excited little voice.

I nodded and snapped both their necks.

I then stole both souls. Wow. Bob had done things I would not have even conceived of.

I sat there for a minute, holding the two small lifeless flesh constructs. I realized that, in a way, I had created a new life form. Two things that didn't exist in this world were just created and destroyed by me.

Suddenly I grew suspicious. I wondered just how much of my power was being withheld from me by the book. I wondered if my memories had been altered. I felt a tinge of anger rise in me from the elder-god. It's odd, but it felt familiar. Perhaps it was always a part of me. I wondered if the book was tricking me into feeding it more souls. Maybe it was doing all it could to manipulate me but stopped short of anything direct in fear that the elder god would crush it.

I would have to play along for now, as I was new in this world and knew nothing. I would need to find out more on the book before figuring out how to act, but my instincts were screaming that something wasn't right.

I sat there quietly in the dark. I felt lonely. I knew now that I was vulnerable here. I imagined that without the

calming effect I may have freaked out back there, and the goblins may well have killed me.

I put the two figures on the ground. The fairy had informed me that magic does not work as a set structure in this world, meaning that I didn't need to think inside of the box.

I grabbed a partial skull from the nearby parts pile. I activated Fleshcrafting and thought of creating a shell of bone around my core. I felt it take form. I compressed the bone in as close as I could get.

Finally I felt a little less vulnerable. I looked down at myself. The goblins had known that I wasn't human. I wondered briefly why I was so attached to looking human if it meant I was sacrificing some of my survival potential in combat situations. I thought about a compromise. It was time to refine myself a bit and smooth out some of the rough edges.

I extracted the goblins; ulnas and radii from both arms. I merged them, converting them into two sharp, curved spikes. I compressed them both down, hardening them. I refined the points to a needle sharpness. I pulled a few of the goblin teeth and coated the tips of the spikes with enamel. They ended up being around a foot long. I inserted them into my forearms on top, matching the curve of my muscle. I attached tendons to allow them to burst forward in a swift motion through the skin of my wrist. I then added tendons to allow me to pull them back in. I felt a little more badass now. At least with this I would never be completely without a weapon.

Now onto my not-human-enough problem.

I focused on my skin tone. I changed it to a more natural flesh tone, though it was still a pale gray. I blunted my eight front teeth, keeping my canines the way they were. You never know when you may have to bite something, and honestly I thought they were awesome. I focused on my eyes. I knew that I didn't want to lose my night sight. I

focused on changing them to a more natural dark grey color. I made them look as human as possible without sacrificing any function. I focused on condensing all the bone and muscle in my body in on itself, putting me at around 6'3" and giving me better defense, stronger muscle, and a more normal height.

I pulled the spaghetti-armed goblin corpse closer.

I tested my bone spike on its skull. It shot right through, hitting the stone ground beneath and giving me an unpleasant jarring sensation. Something like biting down on a rock. I pulled my arm back and looked at the spike. It was undamaged. Yes, these would definitely work. I pulled the spike back into my arm and focused on healing the wound where it came out.

Now for my other issue. I was a bit lonely, and the little flesh constructs had given me an idea. Why not build a companion?

Chapter 7: Hopeless — Threscia

It had been my own personal hell. They had taken my arms, my legs, my tongue, my eye, and my hope.

It stank so bad. They kept me in a tent lying in a pool of my own blood and excrement. They would take me at all times of the day and night, depriving me of any form of sleep except the few times I died. But that blonde bastard would just bring me back, and the hell would resume.

All I knew now was pain and vulgarity. I stopped giving reactions at all after the first day. That's when the hitting started. They would beat me just to hear me cry out. Some had even gone so far that I had swallowed pieces of my own teeth. I knew they broke my jaw. I'm sure they broke my nose. My face felt like it was badly swollen. It felt like my neck would break from the number of times I had been violently shaken and strangled.

I thought back on my parents. Had they really only raised me to have me end life like this?

Mother, your daughter is dying. Father, your daughter is being raped.

A smoldering anger flared within me. I felt a mass of hatred washing over me. I was alive, damnit, but I was so helpless.

Were these things really human? How could they do this to another living, breathing person? I had heard stories of orcs kidnapping girls. But even then, they were kept in one piece and given food and water. Not taken apart and kept in a tent just to be made to suffer over and over again.

There was such cruelty here. This had nothing at all to do with survival. No one was forcing them to do this. They were enjoying it. Enjoying my suffering as, what? A form of entertainment?

I had been reduced to this for their pleasure alone.

I had heard stories of Therossa and Rosereth, how they watched and protected us all. My name itself came from the goddess's name. That blonde bastard had confessed to me that he was in the clergy. He said he would make sure I was too unclean to be allowed into paradise after my death.

Screw these so called goddesses! They had gifted my tormentor and allowed him to do this to me.

Screw humans. What humanity is here? What about this is noble and pure, as Therossa claimed humanity to be?

No! I simply cannot take it. I can't do this anymore. I bit my lip until I felt blood.

I call out to anything, any creature in the abysmal void, any god of destruction, anything at all, to let me kill them. I needed them to suffer like I was suffering. I wanted them to feel what I felt, to know what they had done to me.

I closed my remaining eye, focusing on the darkness, trying with all my strength.

I thought "Help! Help me! Kill them, kill me, anything please! I will give you my life! I'll give you my very soul!" Nothing. Nothing happened. Nothing came.

My eye flew open as I heard the leather flap slapping the side of the tent. The blond bastard was standing there with a crooked grin on his face.

He lazily flipped his knife in the air as he spoke. "Well, little girl, today is your lucky day! Your replacement is coming, so we don't have any more use for you."

I stared at him, directing all my hatred, hoping he would burst into flames — hoping that he would just die.

"Oh ho, what's with that look? Well then, if that's how you want it, I'll treat you like the filth you are." he said with a smirk.

He grabbed me roughly by the hair and began dragging me, letting my skin scrape against the ground as he went.

We had gathered an audience of men who whooped and whistled. It was plain to see that they expected a show.

I noticed a terrible smell growing stronger as he dragged me. No, he couldn't be going there...

I screamed as much as my dry, ragged throat could manage. If only I hadn't given him that look, maybe he would have killed me there.

One of the men who beat me had hinted at the possibility, but I thought it was just to get a reaction.

He dropped me roughly on the ground, my head hanging over a large trench. The smell was nauseating. The smell of human waste. In the hole I saw more bodies. One had hair as long as mine, one glossy eye staring up to the sky. The rest of her was completely submerged, but I could tell. This was probably the girl I had just replaced.

I felt a sharp pain as he dragged a knife along my throat. He kicked me into the hole. I heaved. I struggled to move with my stumps but only sank deeper. I gagged and gasped for air as the vile substance entered my throat and lungs.

When I looked up, he was walking away to the applause and cheers of the onlookers. I started convulsing until everything mercifully faded to black.

I cursed this world one last time.

Chapter 8: Companion — John

I thought for a long time about how to do it. The body would be tricky and drastically time consuming. I thought about which soul to infuse into it. If I made it female, I could likely use the lusty goblin's soul.

If I made it male, I could use Bob's personality — though I worried a bit at how deranged Bob may be. He did seem smart and grateful, however. There was also goblin number two, but he seemed entirely too timid to be of use. Dipshit was out of the question; he would stab me in the back the first chance he got, even if it was just his personality.

I decided I needed to finish things with my souls.

I opened up the soul screen once more.

I right-clicked on Dipshit and selected **Convert to Mana**.

A blue bar appeared in my interface with 40/40 written on it.

I assumed this was my mana bar. It was sad that I didn't regenerate mana like a normal person. But I didn't know any spells yet, either.

I opened up Bob's soul and converted his memory except for the last day into mana. I clicked on Magic and absorbed it.

*You have learned the spell **Dark Tendrils** level 1*

*You have learned the spell **Petrifying Gaze** level 1*

*You have learned the spell **Weakness** level 1*

I had the feeling that if Bob hadn't been so consumed from burning there for so long I could have learned more.

I went to goblin number two and converted his memories to mana.

My mana from him and Bob was now 60/60

I absorbed the goblin's skills.

You have learned Archery level 2

You have increased your level in Cooking to level 2 and learned the recipe Goblin Pie.

You have learned Hide level 1.

He had no magic option. I left him with just his personality.

I opened the lusty goblin soul and selected talk.

"AHHH! You kill him! You kill him! You kill me!" The goblin soul began to freak out, running back and forth on the screen.

Okay, this is unproductive. I closed out of Talk. I converted the goblin's memories to mana. I left skills and personality. My mana was now 70/70. Hmm, I wonder why I only got ten from that one. Maybe there is a quality factor to memory, or maybe she was younger than the rest.

I had the basics of a plan forming in my mind. I liked Bob and didn't want to consume him any further. I felt a bit guilty for leaving some memories of suffering, but I didn't want to have to go through introductions again, either.

The timid goblin's soul seemed to have a feminine vibe to it, and given his inferiority complex from the parts he was originally given, I didn't think he would mind becoming a female.

It just felt bad to leave my first flesh constructs to rot in a cave.

I picked up the male. I decided to give it some defenses of its own. I was basically creating a new race. I couldn't have it be little, ugly people. Not when I could do better.

I activated Fleshcrafting.

I decided to beef him up some more. I grabbed muscle and tendons from Dipshit's remains and made him much stronger. I lengthened his arms down to his knees. I changed the foot into a claw, grafting on the strong goblin toenails and condensing them down to size. I gave the claws sharp points like a bird of prey. *Bird, huh, there's an idea. Why don't I give him flight?* I thought about bat wings. I

knew given his current size and weight I would need to make them big.

Using the bone from Dipshit and the skin from the goblins, I made them stretch from the top of his shoulders to just above his knees. I made his bones hollow throughout. I gave him razor-sharp teeth, kind of like my original set. I darkened his eyes to resemble mine, giving him night sight. I lengthened the ears a bit, making them pointed. I decided goblin yellow just wasn't his color, so I changed it to a dark grey similar to a bat's.

Hmm, this looks a little familiar. Something like a small gargoyle. I decided to give him arm spikes like mine. As I was crafting them I thought of a snake's fangs and how they are hollow. That way they wouldn't slow him down in the air. Unfortunately I didn't have anything that could spit poison in the parts pile. I decided he could inject things with stomach acid. Probably not enough to kill anything, but it would certainly hurt and definitely get infected.

I made the same changes to the female construct, making her a slightly lighter grey. She looked like a small amazon gargoyle. I felt a tightness in my pants again. Damn Perverted Guy's curse.

I held up the male construct and dragged Bob's leftover memories and personality into it.

"Hello again, Boss! Why am I still here? Why are you more handsome?" Bob looked himself over and whistled. "Wow, this is new! I see you thought of something more interesting to do with my soul."

I couldn't help but notice that Bob was still speaking English.

"Like I told you Bob, you're my only friend here. Plus, you have to admit this is kinda awesome!"

I set him down on the ground. He waddled around a bit before walking semi-normally. I guess walking with claws can be a little difficult. He looked at the spike protruding a

bit from his forearm and shot it out a few times, laughing each time.

He looked up at me. "Wow, these things are great!" He alternated plunging them out and pulling them in with both arms.

"I know!" I responded doing the same thing with mine.

We sat there for a few seconds shooting out arm spikes and cackling like schoolchildren. Until Bob noticed the female construct. His face turned into a grimace.

"You're not bringing that arse back, are you?" he asked, looking angrily at it.

"Ha, no, that guy is mana now. No, this is for one of the goblins. I've wiped their memories, so they will probably take to this body quickly, but they may be dumber than a box of rocks for a while." I laughed. "All right, Bob, I'm going to get back to work here. Try getting used to your body, maybe even try to fly a bit." Bob nodded with some enthusiasm, admiring his outstretched wings.

I opened my Souls panel again.

I had already decided on the timid goblin because if I used the lusty one Bob would be utterly unproductive, though thoroughly reproductive. I decided to talk to the timid goblin soul now that it didn't have its memories. I was hopeful that it would not freak out like the lusty one had done before.

I right-clicked on the timid goblin and selected talk.

A soulflame appeared with goblin ears. Its eyes looked at the floor.

"Hello there, how are you?" I said.

It pensively looked up at me. "I is fine, me thinks. Me feels like something missing, something important. Not tell what though. Me feels not right."

I wondered if it was its body or its memories it sensed missing.

"Well, one of the things you may be missing is a body. I have one for you here, but first I need to check on a few

things. So please wait there."

I wanted the goblin to know English like Bob did. But something was bothering me about that.

I called the fairy, who appeared and looked at the soul and then at me.

"Fairy, I know that you've been holding out on me, and honestly I feel like you might be trying to manipulate me. I'm sure you know how the elder god feels about that. This GUI you've set up, and these tutorials, and even your form. I know you're using them to limit my capabilities, to hide what I can really do." The fairy looked taken aback.

"I told you, you are my Master! I have not withheld anything," she said with a look of resolution.

"Then explain Bob. He speaks English. He acts like someone from my world. His responses are all what I'd expect of a friendly person. Don't think I didn't notice how much he was changed and how you didn't give me any of those editing capabilities." I stared at the fairy with cold eyes.

My elder-god side had awoken a bit at its own mention and now seemed to stare, as well. Our attention was fixed on the fairy and on the book inside me.

The fairy shuddered. "You are part of a god, and I am now a part of you, as well. I could never — "

I cut the fairy off. "I feel it throughout myself. You are not immune to me just because I absorbed you."

I felt a bit of longing well within myself. I wanted to consume this fairy, this book of souls.

"You know what's about to happen, don't you? Just give me a good reason not to, and I may reconsider." A malevolent smile spread across my face. *I hope she lies to me again.*

A deep, dark voice came out of the fairy — a voice that I had only heard once before. It was voice that told me it would take my soul from the first time I was consuming the

book. Maybe this was even the same thing that kept me from leaving the cave back then.

The voice said, "Fool! You are too weak to be my Master! You have no power over me! I will tear your soul apart."

It started to chant the very same chant that Dipshit had done earlier, but it was much more effective. I felt myself beginning to fade again, that unpleasant pulling, but this time I was not worried.

My voice came out, my true voice: "I am he who is not! I am the end of things! The true nature of all. I am the void."

That's right, I had felt it for some time now within me. That insatiable hunger. I mentally laughed. You can't break something that is the essence of nothing. I started to consume the fairy, consuming completely, consuming it to the void. I guided my efforts to that one voice in the thousands that were a part of the fairy-book.

Convert to Mana.

The depiction of the fairy grimaced and lost form, turning to green flames. It seemed to be trying to repent. It seemed to regret. It tore at the things around it. Then it was no more.

Mana 10,070/10,070

Chapter 9: Bandit's Camp — Leader

We had been in this forest for so long now. We'd move camps only when the smell got too bad.

We got a fair amount of coin from the Duke's carriages. We didn't lack food or drink. One could almost be happy with this setup if it weren't for that bastard Thads and his disgusting habits.

In the Garanth Empire I was a general and a good one at that. I had worked my way up from the bottom through years of pain and struggling.

In Garanth if you were poor you had to chose between being a soldier or death. I was an orphan, the son of a prostitute who died bringing me into this world and a man I never met. There were no orphanages in Garanth. It was just assumed you would work, die, or get taken by the army.

Garanth had no beggars, no vagabonds. It was a right of passage that you must have at least one kill under your belt before you could claim to be a man. So most youths would hunt the streets looking for easy prey. They would cut off their victims' ears and bring them to the barracks in exchange for a badge and better treatment when they enlisted.

There was no punishment for murder unless your victim was an officer or a noble. But there was honor. If you were seen stabbing someone in the back, everyone who was considered a man would be honor-bound to kill you. Fighting women and children would result in the same. There were no injured or elderly men in Garanth. You were expected to fight until you died. If you could no longer fight, a friend or family member would end your life out of consideration.

I was proud to be Garanthian because being Garanthian meant you were strong. It meant you had true honor.

There is no honor here.

This Thads bastard is an affront to everything. He is weak-looking, skinny, whiny, and a girl-murderer. Just looking at him makes my skin crawl like having a spider on your neck.

He is not the only one, either. He has his own group of cutthroats and petty vandals who follow him around like he shits gold. If I could, I would kill him outright on principle alone. But this heinous assignment keeps me from it.

I was not the fool they all thought me to be. I knew I was only freed to lend Thads credibility in recruiting and to be the scapegoat when this was all done. I knew they were planning to blame it all on me and hang everyone except for Thads as soon as this merchant-guild bride business was done with.

I had often wondered why the Duke didn't place a female agent in a town and have her wed his son. The only answer I can think of is to get Thads out of the city and to hurt the merchant guild without retribution. We killed their drivers and their coachmen. We destroyed their carriages, and we kept their attention focused on something other than the Duke's odd dealings. The mercenary guild had even refused to work with them after we had killed so many of their men acting as escorts.

Thads was always drinking, fighting, and playing with his "toys" as he called them. So he never took much notice of what I was doing.

This whole assignment turns my stomach, and I'm not alone. Many of the defectors and deserters feel the same as I do. But with nowhere else to go and no better source of payment, their prospects are limited.

I had been gathering men with similar thoughts for a while now.

The criminals and punks would hang around Thad, but I had the military men, those with honor.

If we killed Thads and his group, we could take all the coin from the carriages and send the girls back on foot. We

could probably get away with this for a few months before the Duke caught on. When he sent his soldiers we could take our coin and part ways.

I could join the rebellion like most of the other Garanthians had. I'm sure the coin I would get here would be enough to earn me a good spot.

"AAAHH! Nooo!"

I heard a shrill screech.

I sighed to myself. I bet it's those damn goblins again.

I walked out of my tent to see Thads dragging a bloodied goblin towards the fire. Ah, I'd seen this before. He will roast and heal it until it stops resisting, then throw its corpse into the latrine.

I didn't care about the lives of lesser beings, but Thads' cruelty rubs me the wrong way.

I walked up to the goblin who was being tied to a pole. I drew my axe and gave it a good solid hit to the neck. Its head tilted off to the side, hanging on by some skin for a moment before hitting the ground.

"How do you expect me to think with all this screaming? Get back to work!" I yelled.

I turned my back to leave and noticed Thads standing in front of me.

He leaned in close to me, putting his head not far from my ear, and whispered.

"You're spoiling my fun, old man. If I say even one unkind thing about you to the Duke, you'll be right back in the dungeon."

I shoved the disgusting pipsqueak aside.

He let out his annoying high-pitched laugh.

"All right boss, were going back to work now." he said.

His face was smiling but his eyes looked like they could kill.

Chapter 10: Reboot — John

Mana 10,070/10,070

That seems like a lot of mana. I brought my emotions under control. I seemed to be able to use the calming effect myself now, naturally.

The elder god seemed to have regained some of its memories from the feast it had just had. We seemed to understand each other more now that our emotions were in sync.

I was sure now that the fairy's creator and my elder god were not the same being. I believe it had only wanted to use me to gather more souls to feed me to its true master later. Fattening the sow before the slaughter.

I was doing that, too, but souls were far too tiny of a meal for me. I would eat worlds, stars, everything, but for now, I would enjoy myself here. I thought about my soul prison. I didn't think I would die if it broke. I think I would instead be released. But at that time, this world and my identity would end.

I felt the souls from the book straining against me, thrashing around aimlessly like a snake's body when the head was cut off suddenly.

I don't know when, but my GUI had disappeared.

I only saw blackness.

I reached out to the souls. I felt them cringe and shy away as my hunger sought them out.

I would remake things. This time, I would do it my way.

I knew I needed a warden. I had to dedicate a part of myself to controlling the souls.

I needed a new fairy.

Some things were still in place, which meant not all of my interface was created by the other god. It all came originally

from my memories anyway. It was just hastily assembled from vague concepts from old RPGs and MMOs I had played.

I thought about a character-creation screen and one appeared. It had gender. I selected female. I was on a race screen. It displayed every race I had ever seen, played, or read about. I selected Fairy and on my screen appeared an iconic green-dress-wearing fairy from movies I had seen as a child.

The original fairy's wings were something I liked. I changed the default wings to a grey version of the soul wings. I changed the fairy's skin tone to a pale white. I made her hair a light grey and lengthened it to the small of her back. I bumped up her bust a bit. I gave her a heart shaped face with big, glowing, purple eyes.

I gave her a dark, thick coat of eyeshadow and long eyelashes. I gave her deep red lipstick. I went to clothing options and clicked through a bit. I selected a maid's outfit, low-cut and short-skirted. Nope, I didn't need to get distracted every time I saw the fairy. I selected what looked like a black Victorian dress. I gave her a top hat and an umbrella. Hmm, something looked off. I removed the top hat and gave her a big scarlet bow. I clicked on personality. I had nothing against the fairy's original personality, but it had betrayed me, and honestly it was way too dramatic. I selected Quiet then Serious.

I clicked Done.

A prompt appeared:

Would you like to name your fairy?

I was always terrible at naming. I thought for a while. I would name her Mors, after Pallida Mors, meaning the pale god of death. One who comes for beggars and kings equally. Though she was beautiful, I needed the souls to know what awaited them if they crossed her.

I clicked Done.

Mors appeared in front of me and gave a humble curtsy. "How can I be of service, my Master?" Her voice had a

tranquility to it like something with the finality of death.

"Rein in these souls, but know they are mine. You will serve me, being a buffer between them and me. You will channel their knowledge when I need it. You will act at an inhuman speed to help me in all the Fleshcrafting calculations I do. Use the souls as you see fit as long as it is for my benefit and by my will." I said this in a serious tone. Mors smiled again before fading away gradually.

The rumbling subsided as the souls calmed down. Now they would not overwhelm me or overwrite my memories. I could remain myself and yet still keep their power.

Time to redesign this dumb GUI. It had a lot of useless parts.

I don't need a health bar, as I generally know when something sharp and pointy is sticking out of me.

I don't need this soul count as I don't intend to convert souls to mana on the fly. I intend to get the most use out of them that I can.

I don't need this bag icon, at least not for now, as I don't have any spatial or dimensional magic.

I'll keep the scroll, but now it is just a log and notepad.

Hmm, something important is missing.

I thought about creating a map icon.

I saw a map icon appear, and if I right-clicked it, it became a mini-map. I would delve into it more before I left. Right now it only showed the cave, and a little of the clearing beyond.

"Mors, is there any way to add more to the map?"

"Of course, Master! There is a problem, however. The last two owners now have their memories in your mana pool. So the info will be over a hundred years old. The owner before that was a hedge witch who avoided living people like the plague. It might just be better to mark a few of the bigger places she remembers on your map and hope that they are still there." Mors said in an apologetic tone.

The map now showed a kingdom named Theross far to the north, and a smaller place called Therograd that was a little closer. But the roads and other small villages were not shown.

"Well, it's a start. Thank you, Mors."

Okay, on to the messed-up and over-complicated character screen. Yeah, that's scrapped.

Give me a character sheet like old-school pen and paper RPGs.

Name: John Slater

Race: Flesh Golem

SKILLS:

Soul Steal: Complete

Feast

Hide: level 1

Cooking: level 2.

Grave Robbing: level 2.

Ancient Languages Translation: level 2.

Archery: level 2

Tailor: level 3.

ABILITIES:

Fleshcrafting: level 5

Soul Control *formerly Soul Infusion

Night Sight

Perversion

SPELLS:

Dark Tendrils: level 1

Petrifying Gaze: level 1

Weakness: level 1

KNOWN POISONS:

Goblin Pie

**All soul management functions have been combined into one ability called Soul Control.*

"When I combined everything for you to make it easier to manage, this happened. It has no level and is thought to be the pinnacle of necromancy. Something I believe only the book itself could do before." Mors said.

"What happened to Soul Steal?" I asked

"Well, when you converted the fragment of a god's soul that was in the book of souls into mana it kind of maxed out. It's way beyond level 10. Now if you can see a soul, it's yours." Mors replied.

Wow, it seemed like I leveled up quite a bit there!

I wanted to check out the other stuff I got, as well.

Dark Tendrils level 1:

Mana cost: 5

Tentacles from the abyssal plains will shoot up from the ground in front of you, rooting all enemies who are touching the ground for a small amount of time.

Petrifying Gaze level 1:

Mana cost: 10

Channel the abyss directly into the mind of an opponent who is looking you directly in the eyes, leaving them frozen in horror for a short while.

"Hmm, something about the abyss looking back should be said here I think." I joked.

I heard a forced chuckle from Mors.

Weakness level 1:

Mana cost: 5

A foe is beset by a feeling of utter hopelessness and dread, robbing them of their willpower to fight.

This power lasts as long as it is maintained but will reduce the mana pool by 5 every 10 seconds.

So, these are Bob's spells. They seem familiar somehow. Was Bob a follower of mine? Was he the one who found the elder-god ichor that became my soul prison? *Am I from the abyss? Is the abyss a part of me?*

Goblin Pie:

Poison

Induces vomiting, diarrhea and can transfer parasites.

Ingredients:

Goblin fecal matter patted into a pie shape then cooked over a fire.

Okay then, I'm definitely not going to any goblin cookouts any time soon.

I was okay with the old souls screen. But now I didn't need the breakdown, as the options were too numerous to list.

I focused again on the timid goblin soul.

"Mors, give it English."

I clicked talk.

The soul was now displayed as a humanoid similar to a goblin but made of green energy.

It once again looked down at the nonexistent floor.

"Sorry about before. A few things happened. How are you?"

The soul looked up and replied evenly in English. "I am a little scared. I saw a blackness as far as I could see. I could not escape; there was nothing there. I was lost." It looked back down again, its eyes closing as if in pain.

"Don't worry, I don't intend to consume you. I have a gift for you in fact. Something to make up for all that." It looked up again.

I still noticed the darkness all around. I focused and opened my eyes.

I heard a loud munching noise and looked over to its source.

Bob was chomping away happily on a huge white bird with multicolored wings.

Well, best not to disturb him.

I looked down to the female figure in my hands. I had apparently crushed it at some point. I returned it to form with Fleshcrafting .

I dragged the timid goblin soul over to the female construct.

The female construct opened her eyes. She looked at her hands in wonder. She then looked at the light coming from the faraway tunnel entrance and seemed to relax in my hand. She stretched her massive wings out as if yawning and clasped them around herself.

She then sat up and looked me directly in the eyes and smiled a soft smile.

"Thank you." she said in a gentle voice.

I heard the munching stop.

Bob came running over, his claws making a clack-clack noise as he hurried.

"BOSS!" He screamed with tears streaming down from his little eyes.

"Boss, do you even know how long you've been like that! Your eyes were closed; black stuff started oozing out of them. You crushed your own creation. Then you just sat there like a statue for days!" Bob sat on the floor wiping his eyes.

I brought my hand up to my face rubbing under my eyes. Sure enough, there was some black oily stuff. Was it maybe remnants of the book's god? Was it part of me? I had no idea.

I placed the female construct on the ground. She and Bob looked up at me and at each other.

I guess I should name her. Damn it! Always with the names. Well, she was a goblin. *What is a female goblin? Goblette... No, that's a cup. Goblin? No, that's just stupid. Wait, if I take the gob off I'm left with Lina. Okay, that will do.*

"Bob, I introduce you to Lina." I pointed at the female creature.

Lina looked up at me and smiled again.

"Thank you... Boss?" she said.

"Yeah, that's fine. You and Bob can call me boss." I replied smiling back.

Bob looked over Lina, admiring her from head to toe. He seemed dismayed that she was still covering herself with her wings wrapped around her.

I looked around the room. There were several rodent bodies, a few crows, and that huge white bird lying around.

I used Soul Steal. My eyes lit up in green flame, everything turned green, and several tiny soul fragments flew into me.

Bob and Lina backed off a bit.

I blinked. The flames went away and the world returned to normal.

Yes, that was far more convenient.

"Wow, Bob! You really seem to have mastered your skills with that body." I said admiringly.

Bob pushed out his chest. "This thing is great, and these arm spikes are never boring." He popped out an arm spike while smiling broadly. Lina looked over at Bob, then brought out her arm, shooting her spike out. She kinda jumped back a little after she did it, but then she giggled.

I also raised a hand, shooting mine out. Come to think of it, I guess I kind of made tiny winged me's.

We all retracted our spikes.

"How's flying going, Bob?"

"I can't really take off from the ground. But if I climb someplace high, I can glide for a while. When I'm hunting I just climb a tall tree and look around for something to swoop down on, then skewer it on the spikes." Bob said while awkwardly trying to wrap himself in his wings as Lina had done.

"Alright, why don't you go show Lina how to hunt? I've got a few more things to do in here. Oh, and no doing to this

one what you did to my last female construct, at least not if she's not willing." I warned.

"Sure thing, Boss," he replied as he and Lina walked towards the cave opening. Lina had an excited expression on her face as she peered into the outside light.

I decided that it probably wasn't right to let them walk around with everything just hanging out.

I wanted to try out my tailoring skill, but I didn't have any supplies. Maybe I could Fleshcraft something?

I gathered the rodent carcasses in a pile and began to peel their skin off. I thought about how hides are converted to leather. I stripped off the fat and dried the skin. I knew with the way their wings were connected with their legs, pants were a no-go. I joined the skin carefully, making something like a toga with tie-offs at the shoulder for Bob. I made something like a one-piece fur swimsuit with tie-ups so Lina could adjust the size.

I retrieved my weapon and took off what was left of my harness.

I tore the rest of Dipshit's robes into strips and braided them together to make a more solid harness. I shaped some rodent bone to make a catch for my weapon, so I wouldn't have to rip it off each time.

I looked at my available souls.

Soul of a Lusty Goblin: 40%

Soul of a Rodent x4

Soul of a crow x2

Soul of a Paradise Falcon 100%

Just out of curiosity I tried to speak with a rodent soul.

A large rat shaped soul appeared. It just kinda skittered around sniffing at nothing in particular.

"Hello there." I said.

It briefly looked up at me, then continued to run around.

All right, that was as pointless as I'd thought it would be.

"Mors, what is a paradise falcon?"

She showed herself and began explaining. "A paradise falcon is a rare bird said to be sentient. Their feathers are very sought-after by shamans and nobles alike because of their beauty and mystical properties. It is believed that if you see one in your lifetime you will be forever blessed with good fortune."

"Thank you Mors." I said.

She demurely curtsied and disappeared again.

According to Bob's earlier chomping, they must be tasty, as well.

I had a weird idea.

"Mors, teach the paradise falcon soul English."

I selected Talk on the paradise falcon.

A radiant bird appeared in front of me. It looked me in the eyes as if waiting.

"Hello there, I'm John."

The bird replied in an ethereal voice. "Hello John, I'm Etreona." It tilted its head, seeming to be amused by something.

"Etreona, what's your most recent memory?"

"I was making my thirty-year migration when I saw a tasty mouse and swooped down to capture it. Right after I caught it, something painful hit me in the back. I can still remember the laughing as it kept stabbing me." She shivered, ruffling her feathers.

She really was a sentient bird! And Bob is still a little demented.

She looked right at me again.

"This really is strange, you know. I've never been able to speak to a person before. I've tried a few times, but they only stared. I've had arrows shot at me, traps set for me and nets thrown at me, but none have ever spoken to me." Her last words trailed off a bit and she seemed a little sad. Maybe she was lonely.

"Your feathers are a sought-after item. They were probably more interested in them than you." I said with a

shrug. "Look, I have to go soon. I still have some things to do, but we will talk again later."

Etreona held out a wing as if inviting me to touch it. I held out my hand and was surprised I could almost feel the soft feathers in it.

"It was a pleasure meeting you, John. Until next time." Etreona said happily as she faded away.

Time to try out some new stuff. I decided I would try to fill my map a bit.

"Mors, I want you to try to absorb the memories from the rodents and the crows and add them to my map."

I opened my map. I now had a view of everything around my cave including a goblin village a few miles away.

I combined the remaining rodent souls into one, then combined the crow souls into that.

I now had:

Soul of a lusty goblin: 40%

Soul amalgamation: ??

Soul of a paradise falcon: 100%

I split the soul amalgamation into categories:

Skills

Personality

I checked out it's skills.

No skills transferable.

I guessed most of what an animal does would be an ability. There's nothing else to transfer that I can't already do or think of doing.

I tried to talk to it.

A large, freaky-looking furry bird with a fleshy tail showed up. I tried saying hello, but it didn't even really acknowledge my existence.

Since I couldn't burn it with fire, I converted it to mana.

Mana 10,076/10,076

I decided to see what the paradise falcon had.

Skills

Magic

Memories

Personality

I chose to look at magic.

Self heal level 1

I knew better than to take that. Fleshcrafting was already far superior, and healing magic could actually hurt me in undead mode.

Still, this meant that it had mana.

I opened my eyes. Bob and Lina were coming back, dragging in something heavy while giggling at each other.

I looked at the majestic corpse of the paradise falcon. I had a strange thought. In most early cultures it was always believed that the heart was where the soul's power lay. So then what if I used its heart?

I removed its heart with Fleshcrafting and opened my chest, attaching it to my own.

Minor mana regeneration ability added. You will now regenerate mana at a rate of 1 mana per hour.

Woohoo! I couldn't exactly be a mage with this, but now I could use a few spells a day.

I stopped Fleshcrafting.

Bob and Lina were now eating something that I could only describe as a large groundhog.

Soul Steal.

Soul of a rodent added

I just converted it to mana.

Mana 10,077/10,077

"Hey guys, get over here." I said.

They both came running over, their little claws clacking on the stone. I presented them with their new outfits.

Bob started putting his on immediately. Lina ran behind my leg before unfurling her wings and putting hers on.

Bob looked a bit like a hornless oni now with his fur toga. Lina walked out shyly. She looked even more like an amazon. Yeah, it was still a bit too adventurous for her, but

she still gave me a happy smile. At least now she wouldn't have to feel so exposed with her wings unfurled.

"Thanks, Boss! I was fine before, but now I feel stylish." Bob turned around a bit as if showing the front and back. Lina just bowed her head before hugging my leg. "Thank you, Boss!" she also said. She seemed grateful.

"All right, you two, go back to eating your rodent of unusual size." I waved them off.

I really needed to do something about this tightness in my pants. Pervy Guy's libido was not to be questioned. I was still getting hard thinking about Lina, and the logistics of trying anything on a five-inch girl just screamed disaster. Besides, I had already intended her to be Bob's wife. How could my new race of tiny gargoyles prosper if there wasn't a man and a woman? I briefly had a mental picture of Bob popping out an egg. No! Just no.

I looked around the room. I had two partially decomposed goblin corpses, several animals, and the badly decayed parts pile.

I think the real problem I'm going to run into is lack of skin coverage. I suppose I could use the skin of the rodents but that would take a while to Blend. It's still worth a shot, or else I may end up terrorizing the nearby goblin village in a most unexpected way.

"OK, Bob, I'm going to be busy for a while again. Come and get me if anything terrible happens."

Bob looked up from his meal, blood dripping down his face.

"No problem, Boss. Got you covered," he said as he went back to eating.

Chapter 11: An Interested Party

I smell something delicious on the wind. A beautiful decay had entered my nostrils. There was so much of it now.

I had been traveling these woods for a while, practically summoned here by all the death.

I had gathered a large group of familiars who crave death, like me. Crows, vultures, grave rats, anything with a weaker will than myself will be pulled into my desire to feed, and will submit to me.

I inhaled deeply. I needed to feed. Three places now. So much death has been gathered. I sent my familiars to scout the closest source. They still haven't returned from there. I sent some out to a farther source. Goblins, they do not satisfy. I sent my last familiar out to the farthest source. They saw several men, all armed.

I will go to the closest one. I must feed.

I walked toward it slowly. I cannot take chances. I will eat or I will die again.

As I walked, I breathed out endlessly, filling my surroundings with a thick fog. I traveled for some time.

I eventually saw something resembling a cave in the distance. With each step that fantastic smell grew. I sat back in my fog.

I will observe this place of death. I will wait here until I find a good opportunity to feed.

Chapter 12: A Mate — John

I started up Fleshcrafting .

I took the two goblins and added them together as best I could. I compressed their bones together as I lengthened the frame to about 5 feet. I made the legs long and slender. I layered the muscle as I went, giving her slender thighs and sleek legs. I widened the hips a bit. I corrected the feet, making them smaller and more feminine. I reduced the size of the belly and layered on more muscle, giving her the slightest hint of a six-pack. I shrank the head down to normal levels and made the ears more human, giving them only the barest hint of points.

"Mors, I need your help here."

Mors came out and looked on in interest.

"How may I be of assistance?"

"I have trouble with faces. You know my preferences, is there any way you can speed this part up?"

Mors took control of me, much like the book fairy had done with Blend, and got busy gathering parts.

Mors went to work on beautifying the face. She gave it big, almost Asian eyes, a small upturned nose, and lush lips. She made it rounder more heart-shaped. She shaped all the teeth to be normal and perfectly aligned. She kept the canines sharp. She gave it perfect eyebrows and a V-shaped hairline. She forced the hair to grow out to the small of her back.

I regained control of my body.

"Thanks Mors."

I looked at her work. It was truly beautiful.

I changed the hair color from goblin snot to a true black color, making it thick, shiny, and smooth to the touch.

I changed the overall skin tone to a pale color similar to my own, but much lighter, almost white. I gave her dark red

lips and changed the skin around the eye to a midnight black, giving her permanent eyeliner. I lengthened her eye lashes and added more of them.

I went over the body once more eliminating, large patches of muscle in favor of lean muscle. I stacked tendons ensuring they were flexible and fast. I reduced the shoulder size and added breasts. The goblins were originally skinny things and didn't have a lot of fat. I borrowed all I could from all the parts around, but the best I could do was around the size of a B cup, maybe a little smaller. It worked with her lean body.

Now for the special features. I had done all I could to ensure she would be drastically fast, but quickness alone isn't enough. I thought about adding bone spikes, but she couldn't just walk around with the tips hanging out like Bob and Lina, and she couldn't heal the holes like I could.

Wait, maybe she could.

With some deliberation and regret I opened my chest and disconnected Etreona's heart. I placed it inside my creation's chest and attached it to her heart.

I took two thin bones from the parts pile and shaped them into spikes much like mine. She didn't really have large forearm muscles that they could Blend into. I placed them underneath her forearm. I hardened and compressed them, adding enamel to the tips, but I left a hollow reservoir and gave her an injection function like Bob and Lina's. Hers were smaller than mine at just around eight inches.

I added some additional features. I felt like this was a hard world. I knew how men treated ladies in a medieval culture. She was truly beautiful, and I wanted her to always have the right to refuse. I added internal retractable teeth to her entrance just below the skin. Should someone she doesn't want try to assault her without her consent, they would not like what they found next.

I Blended the skin all together and eliminated any irregularities.

Now for the soul.

I was originally going to use the lusty goblin's soul for obvious reasons. But I felt like Etreona deserved something as well.

I opened the soul screen.

Soul of a lusty goblin: 40%

Soul of a paradise falcon: 100%

"Mors, teach the goblin English."

I selected Talk with the lusty goblin soul.

A goblin figure like the one I had seen before showed up. It looked me up and down, lingering at a certain point as she smiled a toothy grin.

"Hello there, I'm John."

The goblin managed to release her eyes from my crotch long enough to look into my eyes.

"I'm sorry, I can't remember who I am anymore. But you, John, I think I like."

"Would it be ok if I introduced you to a friend?" I asked.

"Ooh, you're kinky! All right, bring them on," she replied.

I selected Talk with Etreona's soul.

The ethereal falcon showed up beside the goblin. It took a look at the goblin and backed up a little.

"This is my friend Etreona." I said.

"I'm not sure I can do it with a bird, but it's worth a try," the goblin said as she eyed Etreona.

"Why exactly have you brought me here?" Etreona asked with some worry in her voice.

"Not for that I assure you. At least not as you are now... er, damn. Nevermind that. This was once a goblin who lived a very unsatisfying life. I have removed her memories and she is now a lonely shell. I figured you understood a thing or two about being lonely as that's the vibe I got from our last conversation. And I had a strange idea." I awkwardly said.

"Yes, I was alone not long after hatching. I had never met another of my kind. We migrate once every thirty years to find a mate, and this was my second trip. I have no mate, no

nest, and no younglings. As you remember we've already talked about my difficulties talking to other beings." Etreona said with a distant sadness in her voice.

"You and this young one are both currently inside me. You're both dead. But I have another option for you."

I opened my eyes, showing them the female flesh construct.

Then I closed them again so I could see them both clearly.

"That is a body I made. The body that will be my mate. Maybe not my only mate given this libido, but one that I will always love. Right now it is a hollow vessel. I am considering bringing one or both of you into it, to live again. To be my mine."

The goblin seemed excited by the word mate. She was the first to reply. "She is definitely beautiful! If I accepted, we could then, mate?" She said with a bit of desperation while putting emphasis on the word mate.

"Yes, again and again." I replied.

The goblin jumped in joy.

Etreona spoke next. "I'm not sure how I feel about this. In a way it's what I've always wanted, but in another it's not truly me."

I thought for a moment before replying. "It may not be you, but part of you is inside of it. It has your heart. I will always be with you; you will not be lonely again."

Etreona looked at me pensively, glancing away after a moment as if she was shy.

I spoke again. "There are parts of each of you that I like. I like how the goblin is honest with her feelings, and I like Etreona's gentleness. I want the two of you together. I want to combine you both and have you as my mate."

They both looked at each other a little shocked.

"Combine? How?" Etreona said

"I will combine your souls. You will both cease to be in your current forms and become one being. I will then place

that being into that body, and we will start our life." I said looking at both of them.

The goblin looked confused. But after a few moments she replied. "This bird is beautiful; that body is beautiful. If you add it all to me, I'm afraid you won't be able to resist me." The goblin smiled then walked over to Etreona and sat down, looking her in the eyes.

"I will not leave you either," the goblin said before hugging Etreona.

Etreona did not pull away. Instead she seemed to accept the honest sentiment.

The goblin slowly released her hug and Etreona looked at me once more.

"I've never had a feeling of closeness like this, after so many years of being alone. I accept. Please let us all be together from here on."

I replied. "As you both wish. I will join the two of you together, and I will see you again when next you open your eyes."

That got to me a little bit. I think this is a good thing.

I combined their souls and dragged it over to my construct.

I looked excitedly at her closed eyes, waiting for them to open.

When they did, she smiled the most beautiful smile I had ever seen. She sat up and held me tight as if embracing a long-missed lover.

We held each other like that for several minutes, just feeling our bodies pressing together before she loosened her grip. She wiped tears from her eyes and looked into mine.

"I'm here," she said.

"And we will always be together from here on." I replied.

I leaned in to give her a deep kiss. She pulled back a little, then seemed to accept it. We let our tongues explore

each other's mouth for a while before I let her lips escape mine.

"What was that?" she asked while her face got gradually redder.

Oh, right, goblins and birds probably don't do that.

"That was called a kiss. Would you like to do it again?"

She was now in full heat. She looked down shyly as if considering, then raised her eyes back to mine. She kissed me hungrily as she pressed her body against me closely. She wrapped her legs around me, squeezing me tightly.

I raised her up, still in my embrace as I stood and took off my pants. She gasped as I lowered her down my body and we felt our connection for the first time as I slid into her.

I held her there in the air as she clung to me breathlessly. I moved my head to the crook of her neck and began to nibble and suck her soft skin as I moved my hips.

She moaned into my ear as she moved her hips in time with mine as if trying to get more of me inside her. I could feel her muscles gripping me with each thrust as we began moving in earnest. We let our bodies slam together as the sound of her voice got louder in my ear.

She buried her face in my neck and her body started to contract. She let her hips go wild as she came. I grabbed her ass and thrust in as deep as I could enjoying the feeling of her insides contracting around me. Her body started to go limp in my arms as she came down from her climax. I could feel her wetness dripping down my leg as I let one of her legs touch the floor. I held onto the other one, letting her foot rest on my shoulder. I wasn't done yet. I pushed her against the wall and continued driving myself into her. With each thrust the head of my cock kissed her womb as she struggled to hang onto me.

"John, please, it's so sensitive right now, be more gentle." She pleaded, but her eyes said she craved more.

"I'm afraid it's too late for that. I'm going to make you mine. I told you, *again and again*." I said as I looked into her eyes.

A devilish smile crept across her flawless lips as I felt her hips moving again. She ground herself against me with all her strength as if trying to force me through her innermost gate. I could feel my orgasm building with each stroke. We kissed again letting our tongues roam and caress each other.

I slammed myself into her one last hard time as my I released my seed inside of her hot depths. It was like she could her insides filling up as she moaned into my mouth while I pumped into her. We stopped moving and just held each other as my orgasm continued. My seed ran down her leg and pooled in the floor beneath us. My orgasm finally stopped but as our sweat slick bodies rubbed together I knew that neither of us were done yet.

I began to pull out of her but I felt the slightest hint of teeth around my shaft and stopped.

"I'm afraid it's too late for that." She said with a wicked grin. "You're mine as well now and only I say when we're finished." She said before kissing me gently.

She pushed off the wall knocking us both to the ground. She was on top of me, one leg still on my shoulder as the other was between my legs. She had been careful to make sure that I didn't slip out of her during the fall. She braced her hands on my chest and brought her legs to either side of my waist. She was now doing the full splits with me inside her.

She ground herself against me as I felt her cervix struggling not to open against the pressure of my tip. There was no space at all between us. She moved her legs around so that only her feet were touching the ground and used all her weight to bounce on me. She began to cry out as her muscles finally gave in letting me slide deeper.

I felt an intense pressure around the head. She began rocking on top of me letting her cervix massage my tip while her walls quivered around my shaft. I admired her erotic form as I felt my seed building. She had been releasing a steady stream of moans for a while now as tears flowed down her beautiful face.

She bent over me leaving her feet planted and her knees in the air as she climaxed for the second time. The stimulation from her body was too much and I once again released everything inside of her. She collapsed on top of me as we both came. She let her knees touch the floor at my sides as her body shook on top of me.

I could still feel her warmth as the constant waves of pleasure assaulted us both. She began to whimper as I began softly thrusting into her. I could feel pressure pushing me out of her cervix as my seed spilled out of her around my shaft and my body relaxed.

She looked up at me with her alluring eyes and I leaned up. I moved the hair from her face and gave her a loving kiss which she gladly returned. I laid back down and she let her head lay on my chest as I ran my fingers through her hair.

I know I didn't need to, but for the first time, I felt like sleeping.

Chapter 13: Best Laid Plans — Leader

After the look Thads had given me, I felt strangely paranoid. He had never taken to open aggression against me before, but this time he stood in front of me as if in defiance.

That look he shot me let me know his intentions. He would make his move soon. I was, after all, spoiling his fun.

I didn't have the traditional Therossian sense of right and wrong, but everything he did rubbed me the wrong way. He didn't care who he hurt as long as he could have his precious fun.

I would have to post a guard tonight. I had a trusted man named Lenthuate, Lenny for short. He had been one of my first supporters. He kept an eye on Thads' minions while I held my meetings and helped me to recruit more people to my cause.

A new coachman had stopped in earlier in the day to inform us that we had another girl coming soon. This time I wouldn't let Thad do his little song and dance. I wouldn't let him torture her.

I couldn't stomach the thought of pretending to be okay with all this anymore. My hard-won honor was already in the gutter.

Tomorrow I would remind him what true strength looked like. Tomorrow, that girl would go free, and soon we would follow. There's no way these amateurs could stand against our combined military training. It would be easy and thoroughly satisfying.

Maybe I would draw and quarter him. Maybe I would roast him alive. I didn't care as long as he died screaming.

I went to my bed and lay down. These days I slept in my armor. I had to be ready for anything.

One night a few months ago I had awakened suddenly. I felt as if something were watching me, only to find him standing over me with his dagger drawn.

When I drew my axe and jumped up he said it was just a joke and he was only testing me. That was when I started posting a guard. Lenny might be young, but he had seen his fair share of action in actual combat. If Thads wished to get past him, he would need more than a few petty criminals with knives.

I closed my eyes with fond thoughts of tomorrow.

I felt something grabbing my arms. My eyes shot open as something sharp was dragged across my throat.

My eyes darted around the room, focusing on Lenny holding my arms as Thads looked down at me.

I tried to yell out, but Thads had his hand covering my mouth. I coughed and felt my throat part as a gush of blood came out.

He can't even do this right. The cut is too shallow. I began drowning in my own blood. What was that gurgling noise; was that me?

I coughed again, splattering them with my blood. I looked at his eyes. The bastard was laughing as he held me there.

More of my men entered the tent.

"I think we got the last of them," someone said.

As my adrenaline hit I began breathing heavily, making terrible sucking sounds. I felt a blade slowly sawing through me without a care in the world.

I heard that bastard's voice one last time. "Woo! Look at him gush. When I'm done, throw his body in the latrine."

Chapter 14: The Morning After — John

I awoke some time later to the sound of chomping.

I felt a weight on my chest. I looked down to see Etreona, should I call her that? We never decided on a name.

She really was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. She must have fallen asleep on top of me with her arms pressed up against me and my arms around her. I noticed Pervy Guy was still saluting. But he felt strangely warm. I moved my hips and heard a surprised gasp. Oh, that's right — we fell asleep in the middle of it. After such an intense experience we must have just collapsed.

She looked up at me with her big eyes, her face gradually reddening. Needless to say, we stayed there for some time repeating the actions of yesterday.

Pervy Guy finally seemed satisfied. She however, looked haggard. Deliriously happy, but haggard.

It was just then that I considered the chomping noise that had stopped some time ago.

Oh shit. I sat up. I saw Bob sitting there casually holding a rodent leg with a broad grin on his face. Lina peeked out from behind him. Her hand over her mouth and her skin a dark shade of crimson.

I hurried to put my pants on.

"Bob, Lina this is... hmm."

She looked up at me as if not following.

"Do I call you Etreona?" I nervously said.

She looked for something to cover up with, but finding nothing just sat back down.

"I don't think that's quite right. I'm not really that person anymore, and if anything you definitely made me yours," she responded, still blushing.

"I want you to name me." Expectation shone in her eyes.

If only she knew how much I hated naming things. Let's think here. She came from a goblin and a bird, Gobird... Damn that's awful. I called the other one Lina, maybe I could name her something similar since they were once both goblins. I could just give a cop-out name like Lilith. No, she's too important to not give her a unique name. Let's go with Leera. Yeah, I like the sound of that.

"How about Leera?" I asked.

She smiled at me warmly. "Yes, I like the sound of it! It's another gift you've given me." She came close and sat down beside me. I grabbed her in a sideways embrace and scooted her close.

Bob was still smiling mischievously.

"That was quite the show you put on, Boss. I had to give Lina a play-by-play to explain everything that was happening. Because of all the noise you two were making, we had a hard time hunting. You probably scared off everything within a mile of here. Leera, you should become a bard, you can definitely hit the high notes. One more thing, Boss: how'd you ever fit all that in such a petite girl? Hell, that had to have been tickling her ribs."

In quick succession Lina blushed to inhuman levels, Leera blushed deeper, and even I blushed. Bob never ceases to amaze me.

I picked up a piece of meat and flicked it at him. It hit him in the face, knocking him on his back.

Chapter 15: Not As Planned — Bob

Something hit me in the face, hard!

When I opened my eyes, Lina was looking down at me with a concerned expression. The boss must have been a sculptor at some point because both she and Leera were works of art.

I was still dizzy, so I decided to lie there for a while. Not like I had anything better to do. I shot Boss a thumbs up, then I thought back on Lina, and what had happened since the time she was made.

I had been trying to impress her for a while now while Boss was doing his crafting stuff.

I owe so much to him. I only remember burning for a day or so, but it still felt like an eternity. I don't want to think of how long I was actually burning there. He even helped me take revenge.

When he made Lina for me I was awestruck. I wanted to teach her everything, but when I took her out hunting she learned too quickly. She was already better at it than I was. When she killed that giant gopher I was amazed. That was her first kill. She just swooped down and hit it right in the eye, like she'd been doing it her whole life. Well, I guess she had. It's hard to believe she had been a goblin in her previous life.

I had told her of the greatness of the boss and what he had done for me. I even told her what she used to be. We both watched him for a while when he was crafting Leera.

I pointed out the goblin bodies. I told her that was what we came from. She said that although she doesn't remember, she feels like a burden has been lifted off of her. She says she thinks she is finally complete.

She always smiles when she talks about the boss. I wonder if she does the same when she talks about me.

When Boss mated with Leera, Lina got all hot and flustered. I thought, *Here's my chance*. I described everything he was doing, but damn, he did things that I didn't even do to Dipshit. He definitely made Leera flexible.

While all that was going on, I got close to Lina. I put my arm around her. I even got to fondle her a bit, but after a while she took off out of the cave. I had to get some relief at that point, even if it did come from my hand.

When Lina returned she was dragging no fewer than three bodies. Damn! I wanted her even more.

Boss and Leera were still going at it. I looked at Lina, and honestly she looked pissed. She just focused on dismembering the rats. Every time Leera would moan she would rip off another part.

I had crept up behind her, hoping to take her then and there, but when I wrapped my arms around her she spread her wings knocking me on my ass. Then before I knew it she had her spike inches from my face. Her face was twisted in rage. She was glaring at me, all her sharp teeth showing in a wicked expression as if she would eat me. It took several seconds before she seemed to notice who I was. She lowered her arm and calmed down before getting back to pulling apart the rodents.

Just then I thought Lina may be the jealous type. Was she jealous of Leera? How the hell would that even work? I mean physically, the boss's pride was at least twice her size.

I heard one last loud moan from Leera before she passed out, even the boss seemed spent as he laid down his head and closed his eyes.

This time it was my turn to go vent my frustration. I perched in one of the trees within sight of the cave. I saw some motion out of the corner of my eye. I had to hand it to the boss, my night vision was great. I swooped down on the moving object, skewering it from behind. I drove my spike into it until it stopped moving. I flipped it over and I took out

my frustration on it. I dragged the remains back into the cave.

I looked around for Lina. I saw her furs lying on the ground a few feet away from where Boss and Leera were lying, but I didn't see her.

I stood there for several seconds just looking for motion. Could she have gone back out while I was hunting? Could she have gone out naked?

I saw the tip of a wing peeking up from between Boss's legs.

I dropped the rat and crept around to see what was happening. She was busy at work on herself, just looking at where the boss and Leera were still connected.

She was covered in something. Was that the boss's seed? She was sitting by the puddle dipping her fingers into it before thrusting them inside herself. Her other slick hand was gliding on over her breasts as she bit her lip to avoid making any noise.

She fell back onto the floor as her legs stretched out straight. Her whole body seemed to be glowing, her skin flushed with passion. She picked up her pace no longer caring about the sloppy noises her hand made.

She opened her eyes wide and bucked her hips in rythem to her probing fingers. Her claws clenched and her legs shook as the slightest of moans escaped her mouth. She shivered there on the ground for a while as her body jerked around and she came. I had to leave before I was spotted.

Needless to say I had to go hunting again.

I just sat in the tree thinking. I thought about Lina. I thought about how pretty she was. She definitely had a thing for the boss, though. I did too; I knew how much I respected him, how much I owed him. I knew, too, that Lina would never be my girl like Boss had intended.

I wondered what I should do. I could have the boss turn me into a lady to join his harem, but I didn't feel like that would be right, as I was definitely a guy. I thought maybe

the boss could give me a different girl other than Lina. I didn't want to think about Lina dying and being replaced by another. I thought that maybe I should become something else, something more dangerous. I craved power. I felt like maybe the boss was part of something bigger. Something that I had revered even before the burning, and I wanted to crush anything that would do him harm.

I had decided to talk to her. Hopefully she was done with what she was doing. Just in case, though, I waited for daybreak before I went back into the cave.

She sat by a row of neatly sorted rat meat.

She had her furs on again.

I whistled as I approached. "Wow! Look at our little butcher over here. You're doing great, now we just need a little shop or maybe a tiny wagon. Think about it, we could open up a rat meat stall." I smiled a goofy grin at her.

She looked up at me and returned my smile before looking back down again as if she was about to say something difficult.

"I'm sorry about last night, I didn't mean to attack you like that." She looked a little sad. She reached her long arm out to me, handing me a rat leg.

I took it and sat down beside her. She had begun to peel the skin off another leg.

I spoke calmly. "It was my fault. I shouldn't have tried to do, well, you, without asking."

She turned a little red and her face had a sullen look on it. I wasn't sure if she was embarrassed, angry, or maybe thinking about the boss again.

She dared a momentary glance at me, then spoke. "I know that the boss made me for you." She trailed off for a moment as if thinking of how to say something. "But I don't feel that way about you. I think of you like a brother. When you showed me the bodies we both came from, things clicked. We're basically twins."

We just sat there in silence for a few minutes before she continued.

"For some reason, when the boss made me, I knew he understood something about me. Something that even I didn't know. I didn't have my memories. But I still remember when he first spoke to me before giving me this body. I remember looking at my glowing goblin self and feeling how hideous I was. I felt like I didn't measure up. I wasn't comfortable in my own skin and I was worried that I might stay that way."

I waited for the right moment and asked her. "So... when did you fall for him?"

She smiled as if remembering something fondly. "It was when he gave me this body. I thought it was beautiful, it was deadly. My shame for myself had disappeared. He was looking at me with so much pride in his eyes. I knew that he would never abandon me — that to him, I was an irreplaceable person. He had given me so much and made me so unique. I noticed how he handled me so gently while smiling down at me."

She now had a bright smile. Her sharp fangs showed and her eyes looked brightly at her furs.

"Then when he had noticed that I was embarrassed he made these for me. After I put them on I could tell he was turned on as he stared at me. I felt desired. I started getting turned on too but knew it was impossible."

Her smile faded and she stared sadly at the floor.

I felt a little sorry for her now. I guess she was going through a lot of stuff, too.

I was a straight shooter, however, and I decided to ask her another difficult question.

"What do you think about our new sister?"

Her eyebrows knit and she made a fist as she spoke. "I know that I can't give Boss what he desires. She is so pretty, even a little delicate. I know she can give him what he needs. I will love her like a sister, but someday, somehow I

will let the Boss know how I truly feel. Even if I become one of many. I had already guessed that someone as great as the boss would have need for more than one girl. I will wait my turn if I have to."

I wasn't exactly a one girl sort of guy myself. More than anything now I felt like we were siblings. Boss had created us both. He had used the same bodies to make us. Maybe it was all on a genetic level, but I felt a kinship with Lina. I felt conflicting urges to both encourage and tease her.

I had chosen to tease them all for now, as I still had a little bit of resentment left in me. But there was no way I could hate any of them.

So I did tease them, then I got hit, rightly so, and now I'm just lying here.

I had lain there for some time going over everything in my mind. I felt a soft touch on my head. The dizziness faded and I opened my eyes to the boss smiling down at me with a finger on my head.

"Sorry, Bob, I may have hit you a bit too hard. You're all fixed now."

Chapter 16: Sleepy Day — John

Bob looked back at me and stood up. He looked absolutely drop-dead tired. I looked over at Lina. She had her wings wrapped around her as she leaned back against the wall. She looked pretty worn out as well.

I walked over to Leera and sat back down beside her. She leaned into me and I looked down at her. Her eyes were bloodshot, her hair was disheveled, and it looked like she had been through a natural disaster. I brushed the hair out of her face and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

A light morning fog hung around the floor of our cave. I had never noticed this before, but I had also never been awake and aware at this hour. It seemed peaceful.

It looked like everyone had an eventful night. Bob walked over to the large rodent carcass by the entrance and began fluffing it like it was an old feather mattress. He hopped on top of it, wrapped himself up in his wings, and crashed down. He seemed to melt into the fur like a Bob-shaped puddle.

"I know *you* just woke up, but I'm pooped. I think I'm going to pass out. Maybe if you hadn't hit me so hard I wouldn't be this beat," he said in a teasing tone before closing his eyes.

Lina seemed to struggle to stay leaning as her head kept bobbing down.

Leera's eyes were already shut, her body limp in my arms.

Nap time. I carefully laid Leera down and reclined beside her to spoon with her.

I felt her body heat as she was pressed close to me and listened to her soft breathing. We just cuddled there for a while until her warmth became unpleasant. I decided to roll

over on my back. I moved carefully as not to wake Leera and left my arm under her head so she would have a pillow.

I didn't have to sleep, so what was I supposed to do here? I felt something climbing up my shoulder. I saw Lina crawling onto my chest. She smiled sleepily at me before wrapping herself in her wings and plopping down. I reached down and softly stroked her hair with a finger. It was kinda soothing. After a while I could hear her slow steady breathing.

I started to move my finger away, but she grabbed it, pulling it back down to her head again. I guess she still wanted more. I continued petting her soft hair for a while. For some reason it was really relaxing me as well. After some time, I stopped. She seemed to be sleeping this time.

I went to move my hand again but she rolled over onto her back and grabbed it. She pulled my hand over herself as if it were a blanket. Stubborn little thing. I just cradled her against my chest and she relaxed again, finally nodding off to sleep. She kind of reminded me of a kitten I had when I was a child.

Well, it seemed like both of my arms were taken. I heard Bob snoring from across the cave. He was a noisy sleeper. He would alternate between sawing logs and laughing. At one point I thought I heard something in an unknown language. Yeah, I guess I could sleep a little. I closed my eyes and drifted off.

Chapter 17: Light Bringer

I arrived at the massive church in Theross. I hadn't seen it since I had my initial self-healing training here when I was knighted all those years ago.

It sat embedded in a cliffside with only one long, narrow bridge to connect it with the rest of the world.

When I compared the chapel to the royal castle, it did not lose on either height or grandeur. Its mighty steeples and spires rose so high into the air that when you stood near it you could no longer see the top. It was truly a wonder to behold!

An elderly clergyman met me by the massive doors and swiftly led me in.

The interior was lushly painted with portraits of Therossa performing her twelve miracles. It showed from the point she created man to the point she banished the elves.

I was guided to High Priest Barneth, who greeted me with his immaculate smile. I dropped to my knees and kissed the tops of his feet until he gave me permission to rise.

"We must make haste, my child, the grand depiction of Therossa has requested us." He helped me back to my feet. A gentle light emanated from his hands as he touched me, relieving all my fatigue from the long trip here.

He guided me at a steady pace to a large chamber far removed from the main hall. Two Paladins stood guard. When they saw Barneth and me, they quickly moved aside and started opening the grand golden doors. Their sabatons scraped the floor and their arms shook and strained from the effort.

As the doors parted Barneth rushed inside and gestured for me to follow.

I heard the Paladins grunt as the doors began to slowly close. The room was dimly lit by several candelabras that

never seemed to go out.

About twenty feet in front of me stood the most elaborate and ethereal painting I had ever seen. Therossa stood there, a slight glow coming from her wings. Slowly and almost imperceptibly her arms seemed to move, forming the symbol of prayer.

Barneth dropped to his knees and bowed his head so low he was scraping the ground. I followed suit.

For what reason was I allowed to witness such beauty? I felt truly humbled in her presence.

I heard a voice seeming to come from all around me. It was like the sweetest honey given to a starving man.

It said, "I have felt something ancient awaken. Far from here the void grows. It will come for us all. It will consume everything!"

Barneth spoke up, his voice muffled by the floor. "What can we do, my goddess? How can your humble servants protect your kingdom?"

I could only kneel there and shake in the presence of something so much greater than myself.

Therossa replied, "You must bind it again while it is still weak. You must make an example of it. You must prove your worthiness to me or I'm afraid the end of our world will come. It exists south of Therograd. Right now I only feel three followers, but in time its power will grow and it will attain godhood."

Therossa's voice shook me to the core, reverberating in my head. I felt my nose begin to bleed. I wanted to pass out but I had to ask a question first. "How can this most unworthy one vanquish this evil?"

The voice spoke again, louder this time. "You have been my champion for most of your life. It must be you. It cannot be vanquished! You must bind this abomination. Go there at top speed with all the support you can muster! I give you my sigil. For any who refuse to aid you, I give the power of condemnation. If they see my sigil and are of my flock they

will die, only to repent for an eternity in my realm of suffering."

I felt a warm liquid starting to drip from my ears. It felt as if I were being crushed by the weight of her words.

"I will depart immediately!" was all I was able to muster.

The pressure in the room seemed to decrease. I chanced a glance at the massive portrait. Its hands had returned to a neutral position and the glow had faded from its wings.

I quickly got to my feet. It would take several months to get there by horseback and I needed to gather people along the way, adding months on top of that. This would be the first crusade recorded in the past millennium, and I would be at its head.

Chapter 18: Rudely Interrupted — John

"Master, wake up! You died!" I heard Mors' frantic voice.

My eyes shot open. I couldn't see much as there was a thick layer of fog on the ground. What the hell happened? It was suddenly freezing in here. I felt Lina on my chest. She wasn't moving. I felt Leera beside me. She was stiff. She was dead!

I tried to sit up but it was too difficult. I was chilled to the bone. I barely made it up onto my elbow. I looked around in a panic. I could just make out some light from the entrance as a massive set of multi-spiked horns pierced the mist. A creature stood there, a thick curtain of fog billowing from its mouth.

From what I could tell it was tall and emaciated. I could clearly see the bones of its chest and its inhuman skull. It had pale yellow eyes that cast a sickly glow.

It scanned the room, its eyes resting on Bob.

"Mors, what on earth is that?"

"From what the souls tell me, that is a wendigo. It's an unbound, undead creature with cannibalistic tendencies. It's greedy, lives to eat, and naturally occurs in areas suffering from famine or drought. It is formed when the souls of those that died of hunger devour each other until they are big enough to converge on a vessel and distort it into a wendigo."

I focused on trying to raise my body temperature with Fleshcrafting.

The wendigo reached its long, sickly fingers down towards Bob. It picked him up and inspected him before opening its mouth and biting Bob in half. I could hear a loud crunch as the creature chewed Bob's left side, bone and all.

I felt fury surging inside me. I couldn't move. I attempted to shout, but only a strained whimper came out.

The wendigo's eyes shot over to me. It glared at me as it took another bite of Bob, now only leaving part of his torso and head.

I felt my rage build once more. I can overcome death, but if it eats Bob, then he is gone. My first friend since I got here will be taken from me.

I closed my eyes and used the calming effect. I need to act quickly and calmly. I couldn't move, so what could I do?

Wait, I think Mors said it was an unbound undead.

I opened my eyes once again just as the creature was about to bite Bob's head off.

I activated Soul Steal.

Green flames burst from my eyes. The creature stopped mid-chew and seemed to suddenly have an 'oh, shit' expression on its face. It dropped Bob and started to turn away. *Too late, you bastard!* It had a tremendous soul flame. As its soul flew inside me the wendigo's body fell lifelessly to the ground.

It's so damn cold here. I hoped the fog would dissipate now that the source of it was gone.

I lay there still for a moment in case there were any more surprises coming. I could barely move. I crawled over to the parts pile and began eating. No matter how rotten, I needed to increase my body heat. I feasted on the minuscule amount of flesh that was there.

I looked around. Lina was still frozen to my chest. Her soul flowed into me first. I looked over to Bob's small remains, and his soul floated over to me. Then I looked at Leera. It had even tried to take her from me. I felt the rage building inside me once more, but I suppressed it. Her soul flew over to me and entered my core.

I closed my eyes while Feast passively raised my body temperature.

I talked to Bob's soul.

A green spectral Bob formed before me.

He looked around as if confused. "Boss? What the hell happened?"

I told Bob about what had happened with the wendigo and about his current physical state.

Bob put his hand to his chin. "Damn, Boss! That's one messed up way to go."

I informed him that I may not be able to remake him exactly as before, but Bob suddenly seemed excited.

"So this thing was actually able to kill everyone, including you, without any of us noticing?" he sounded somehow impressed by the wendigo.

"Yeah, my best guess is that it flooded our cave with its fog, then proceeded to come inside for a snack. I, however, can be undead as long as it doesn't pierce my core, so I was able to steal its soul." It was my best theory as to how I'd survived.

Bob seemed to contemplate things for moment before speaking. "Boss, I want you to make a new body for me out of the wendigo. I want to be able to kill more than just vermin."

I thought about what Bob was saying. "But what about Lina? Would you abandon her?"

Bob had a sad smile. "I'm sorry, Boss, but Lina and I aren't going to work out like that. She's basically my little sis."

Now that I thought about it, I supposed they were made out of the same parts, from the same goblins. I hadn't investigated the wendigo corpse yet, so I didn't know what options I had available.

"OK, Bob, I will see what I can do. You just sit tight here, and I'll make you something awesome."

I closed the soul window. I was glad that Bob survived mostly intact.

I opened my eyes and canceled Soul Steal.

Most of the fog had started to clear and I was able to move a little better. I crawled over to the wendigo corpse.

I thought back on the paradise falcon's body. I was able to guess correctly that its heart was its source, but this thing is a lot more complicated.

"Mors, is there any way I can analyze a body to see what parts could grant abilities?"

Mors appeared and seemed to think for a moment.

"There just might be a way, Master. Try fusing yourself with a part of it. If you do, then I may be able to treat it as if it were your own body and create a readout for you."

I moved my finger to the side of the creature's leg. Using my fingernail I cut into it, then fused it to my finger.

"Here is your readout, Master."

NOTABLE PARTS:

Eyes of the wendigo: The eyes of the wendigo can sense the life-force of anything they can see, enabling the wendigo to find the freshest meat.

Abilities Granted:

Life Sense: You can see the living or the recently deceased even through thin obstacles.

Coerce Lesser Lifeform: The eyes may be used to passively affect the will of lesser life forms to do your bidding.

Nose of the wendigo: The nose has a profound sense of smell. It is extra-sensitive to the smell of death.

Abilities Granted:

Profound sense of smell: Passive

You will be able to smell death for miles away if the wind is in your favor.

Lungs of the wendigo: The lungs of the wendigo actually work in tandem drawing in and exhaling air at the same time. They are not used to breathe. They are used to infuse mana into the air.

Abilities Granted:

Mana infusion: By drawing air into your lungs you may infuse it with effects.

Fog generation: By exhaling you can generate a thick fog that carries any infused effects to potential victims.

Heart of the wendigo: The wendigo heart is a hard structure and was not be used to circulate blood. It was used instead for mana regeneration and soul storage.

Abilities Granted:

Moderate Mana Regeneration: You will now regenerate mana at a rate of 5 mana per hour.

Natural Soul Storage: This heart is a naturally occurring soul prison; it may house multiple souls. Naturally occurring soul prisons are considered rare and valuable to necromancers.

Stomach of the wendigo: The stomach of the wendigo can convert what it eats into mana. It also passively absorbs soul fragments, automatically converting them into mana.

Body of the wendigo: Wendigos are powerful beings. Their strength and resilience is considered to be among the higher ranks of the undead. Their tough, emaciated flesh is hard to cut or pierce by normal means. They are known to be one of the most terrifying beings to encounter, though very few live to share what they have seen.

I separated my finger from the wendigo.

This is pretty amazing. I'm sorry, Bob, but I'm taking a lot of this stuff for myself. I flexed my hand and sat up. It was still daytime outside. Though the cave's floor still felt cold to the touch, things were starting to warm up. I was able to move again.

I decided to get to work.

I activated Fleshcrafting .

First I took out its left eye, then my own. I compared them. Its eye still had a faint glow. I placed the eye into my socket and activated Life Sense. I looked around. It was basically like infrared except everything was a shade of yellow. I looked at the rodent carcasses that were spread out around me. The fresher ones had some red on them. I looked at my hand. It was a darker shade of red. With my other eye I could see the yellow glow on my hand. I deactivated Life Sense, and the glow faded.

I closed my right eye. You never really realize just how dark it is in here without night sight. If daylight wasn't coming from the entrance, then I probably couldn't even see my hand in front of my face. I closed my eyes and thought about modifying the eye to add night sight. I opened my eyes. *Ah, better. Hmm, wait a minute.* An idea struck me. I closed my eyes again and thought about modifying my right eye to add Life Sense. I blinked my eyes alternating left and right. Yep, I had Life Sense in both.

I was starting to understand how Fleshcrafting worked. Anything that was a part of me I immediately had an understanding of. I added coercion to my right eye. Pity I didn't have anything to use it on. I modified what used to be my left eye to have all three abilities and placed it back into the wendigo. My eyes were now both glowing. I deactivated Life Sense and the glow stopped.

I looked at the eye I had placed in the wendigo. It was now a deep amber color instead of a sickly yellow.

I looked at the wendigo's nose. It was like the nose of an animal in shape but its skin was a pale, muddled flesh color. I separated it from the wendigo and Blended it with my own, making it a more pleasant human shape. I finally had a full nose, not the nub I had been calling one. I inhaled. Yeah, this place definitely smelled like death. Luckily for me my ghoul stomach found that smell to be delicious. I converted the surrounding tissue on the wendigo's face to form

another nose with all the capabilities similar in shape to mine. I looked for a second. *No, this won't do. That perfect human nose on this emaciated dog/deer face just doesn't seem right.* I sculpted the face inward, condensing bone and lengthening teeth. I made the nose a bit more animalistic, this time adding that darker color you might expect to see here.

This thing still looked absolutely horrifying but also a little more natural now.

I needed to streamline this process. Rather than exchanging everything as I had been doing, it might be quicker to modify what I already had.

I plunged my spike into the wendigo's torso and inserted my entire hand. I fused my hand with its organs and nerves. A thick, viscous, black substance oozed out. I'm guessing that this is what the wendigo used as blood.

I modified my parts to be similar to the wendigo's. I changed my stomach to have the wendigo's capability to convert what I ate into mana. I still retained my Feast ability. The lungs weren't too hard, but I did still want to breathe, as rotting didn't appeal to me. I wanted the Mana Regeneration from the heart, but I detested soul prisons. I had no intentions of binding anything. I copied the Mana Regeneration and converted the wendigo's heart to a soft functioning one so it would no longer be a soul prison. I used Blend on the wendigo's skin to give it an even skin color.

Well, Bob won't like this. It doesn't seem to have any reproductive organs. Hell, I should put him in here like this just to see his reaction. But after laughing to myself for a while I decided that wouldn't be right.

I actually didn't have any flesh to spare to create him anything else. I also didn't like the bony look of the wendigo. I needed to go hunting to get Bob some more parts before I transferred him into this thing. I wanted him to be beefy, or at least to get him some more fat and skin. Most of the wendigo's strength came from the fact that it was undead.

When I brought it to life it would lose that toughness. Like the difference between steak and beef jerky. I absolutely refused to turn Bob into an undead, as that would bind his will. He would only be a puppet then.

It was time for some upgrades.

I picked Lina up and fused my finger to her abdomen. I gave her the eyes with all capabilities but made them a bright green color. Her heart was too small to get good mana regeneration but I guessed this would give her about half a point per hour. That just wasn't enough for much of anything.

I needed to make her bigger. I guess the easiest thing to use would be Bob's remains. I was letting him have the wendigo anyway after I was finished modifying it. I really needed someone to help me with hunting, and Lina was our expert.

I removed my finger from Lina and grabbed Bob's remains. I examined them. He was little more than a head and part of a torso. I felt a sense of loss when I looked at them. This body was something I had made for him. It was how I viewed him in my mind. I had spent time crafting this body, and in an instant my work was destroyed, and my friend was almost taken from me.

I had a relatively disgusting idea. I knew the wendigo converted things it ate into mana, but maybe it didn't quite digest all of Bob.

I thrust my spike into the wendigo's stomach and inserted my hand once more. This was becoming a gross habit of mine. I was able to pull out a leg and a bit of wing. The wendigo's digestion didn't waste time.

I now had maybe half of Bob's body in scattered parts.

I tried combining it together with Lina's body in the same way that I had combined the goblin bodies to make Leera.

Lina was now about eight inches tall. I checked the heart again. It was still not even 1 mana per hour.

I looked around the room. There were several rodent corpses and pieces. I gathered those up and placed them into a pile. The parts pile was now more of a bone pile after I made Leera.

Oh god, it had been planning to eat Leera! I felt ashamed. I had just mated with her and she had already died in my arms. I hadn't even been here for a full week yet, and I was already failing the woman I loved. Everyone needed to get stronger, especially me.

I felt my hatred creeping back up again. The elder god had responded to my feelings once more. It seemed to say, "If you've seen enough of this world, let's just consume it all." I had to remind myself she was still alive inside me. I would fix her as well, but first I needed to think about how to improve her survivability. Of all of us she was still the most at risk. She was highly visible and her only combat attributes were quickness, agility and mild self-healing. This might work if she knew some kind of martial art, but I myself didn't even really know how to fight.

I walked over to the parts pile. I saw Etreona's corpse. Bob had eaten most of it from the head to the breast. It was a good thing that Leera had been too busy with me to notice it earlier. That may have been traumatic for her to say the least.

I grabbed the paradise falcon's body and added it to the rodent pile.

I remembered that Mors had informed me that the feathers were sought-after. Maybe there was more to these feathers than just the bright colors.

I joined my finger to the bird carcass.

Ah, so that was why. The feathers can gather mana from the air around them passively. With just one paradise falcon feather you could practically double your mana regen.

But I couldn't just give the wings to Lina. The wings were quite vibrant. They spanned from a light teal to an eye catching orange. I didn't want her to be a target for hunters

while she flew. Nor did I want her to alert any potential prey. I would need to change the colors later.

I also wanted to impart this gift to Leera, as it was something she would already be accustomed to.

I pulled out a few red and white feathers to set aside for Leera. I thought it was important that she had parts from her original body instead of replicas.

I used Soul Steal on the rodent pile. I got another five rodent souls.

I began the slow process of Blending everything together. Lina was now at around sixteen inches, thanks mainly to the paradise falcon. She had a wingspan of around three-and-a-half feet.

No, I could do better. I grabbed some additional bone from the parts pile and moved over to the wendigo. It just didn't seem right to have to look up to Bob anyway. I would borrow some sections of the wendigo. Lina needed to be bigger because we wouldn't be hunting vermin this time.

I got to work Fleshcrafting.

Now Lina was around two feet tall. Her wingspan was around five feet. Her wings were a combination of bat and bird, but she was missing several feathers. I changed the overall wing color to a midnight black, similar to a raven's. I added a few more layers of the mana-gathering feathers. Her heart was now larger than the paradise falcon's heart was. It was able to get two mana per hour. She could now potentially cast a few spells a day with the heart alone. She had a massive mana gathering potential now, though, with her wings.

I opened the wendigo's soul and clicked on Magic.

Curse of Sleep: When used the target will feel an almost unbeatable drowsiness that will compel them to sleep.

Curse of Paralysis: When used the target will be unable to move for a time.

Cold Infusion: A primal form of cold magic that does not rely on water. This is mainly observed in powerful forms of the undead such as the lich. It is often used as a method to prevent decay. In ice golems it prevents melting. In traditional magic this would be used in conjunction with water magic to create ice constructs for offensive purposes.

Looking at the wendigo's magic made a shiver run down my spine. I remembered that morning fog and how everyone got tired. It basically put everyone to sleep, paralyzed them, then let the cold kill us all. No wonder so few see the wendigo and live. It must seem like they were spirited away.

Even I could have died. If I hadn't been sleeping with Leera and Lina at the back of the cave I would have been frozen solid and unable to do anything. I can't be paralyzed in undead form, but I have a Weakness to cold since I have to consciously raise my body temperature in that mode. Leera and Lina's body heat and my distance were the only reason I was able to move at all.

I dragged Curse of Paralysis onto Lina's soul.

I modified her new bone spikes to have Mana Infusion in the acid injectors, so now she could add effects when she stabbed something.

I Blended her skin to remove all the blotches from where I'd had to improvise here and there. I smoothed out her muscle and pulled more from the wendigo to bulk up her legs a bit. She now had talons, thanks to the paradise falcon, instead of claws.

I hadn't spent enough time on her before, and now that I knew more of her personality I could do more for her.

I changed her hair color to light grey. I lengthened it once more to her shoulders but kept it shorter in the back. I darkened her skin a bit, now making it more of a slate color. I wanted to make her face more girly, but I wished to keep her sharp features.

"Mors, a little help here. Use what I know about amazons to make her face as striking and attractive as you can."

"Yes, Master, just a moment."

Mors took control of me and moved at inhuman speeds, pulling tiny pieces of muscle and skin from the wendigo and using what she could from the rodents.

I regained control of myself.

"Thank you, Mors."

Sometimes Mors seems too quiet.

Lina now had a low, perfectly squared hairline. Her eyebrows were bushy and short but well shaped. Her eyes were perfectly proportioned for her face. Her cheeks and nose were kept sharp, yet womanly. Her lips had been darkened and smoothed, and her chin ended in a soft point.

She now had the sort of face that could be described as cool when in a neutral expression, sexy if she looked you in the eyes, and terrifying if she was angry.

As a sort of mean joke I decided that since she had a habit of blushing and not expressing herself much, I would add more capillaries and thicken them. Now her blushing would be on a whole new level. Yep, I wouldn't be telling her about this addition.

I looked at my work. She was quite imposing for her size. I kept everything feminine. However, she didn't have a shred of fat on her body except for her chest. Her breasts had unfortunately shrunk to a C cup from the growth and me lacking many sources of fat.

Her arms were ripped. You could see every muscle in them. She had six-pack abs that ended in a slender waist. Her broad hips and strong, pronounced thigh muscles were incredibly sexy. Her ass was tight and toned, but still soft to the touch. Damnit, Pervy Guy! Not now! Her legs transitioned into talons from the knee down. I made the talons black.

The tightness in my pants had returned once more. This new form of Lina was really having an effect on me.

Something about being so small, looking so ferocious, and having such a timid personality was making me want her a bit. Would Bob be angry? Would Lina want me? Would Leera be pissed?

Well, maybe just a little bit of perversion since I am basically designing her right now and wouldn't want her to have any imperfections.

I spread her legs, slowly parting those powerful thighs. I had definitely done a good job here. Pervy Guy was paying full attention as I sat her in my lap. I added a tuft of light-grey pubic hair. I moved my pinky over and spread her open. It seemed like she might be able to take one of my fingers now.

My heart started beating again. My breathing became heavy. I needed her to be a little bigger if Pervy Guy was going to have any fun here. Without thinking I reached over to the wendigo and grabbed more muscle and took more bone from the pile. I expanded her hips more and lengthened her torso, blending as I went.

I used my hands to squeeze around her and guessed that she now had a bust at nearly thirteen inches, a waist that was about nine inches, and hips that were almost sixteen inches around. I made her entrance larger. I spread her open once again. I think now with some effort she could probably take half of my length. But what about pregnancy? A baby from me would kill her. Thanks to Etonea's body, I had an idea and the source to work with. I reworked her reproductive organs to enable her to lay eggs.

She was finally ready to try out. My heart was still pumping hard, my blood rushing through my veins. Pervy Guy was now straining to get out. I let him free. I started lowering her down, our parts barely touching. *No! Nope, I'm just not sinking this low; she has no consent here.* I moved her away and relieved Pervy Guy's buildup onto the floor. I placed him back in his prison.

I lowered Lina's body back onto my lap once more. He just wouldn't give up, however, and remained straining at my pants. Her legs were still spread. I leaned her forward into me and moved her hips back and forward a few times, feeling her weight on my lap as she rubbed against me through my pants.

I couldn't let this go any farther. I desperately needed to do something before it was too late. I quickly dragged Lina's soul into her new body.

Lina tensed up. I saw her clamp her talons shut. She grabbed my harness with her hands and looked up at me in a deep crimson as she realized she was naked. She looked around and seemed to be taking in the situation. She stared into my eyes as her brows knit together. Her mouth opened slightly and she moved her hips back and forth before reaching down to feel what she was sitting on. I twitched involuntarily. Her whole body reacted as she stumbled backwards, awkwardly falling onto the worse place possible on the floor. *Oh shit!* She landed right in my wet spot.

She brought her hand up to her face and inhaled. She quickly wrapped herself in her wings and sat there for a while, shaking. She seemed to glare up at me, meeting my eyes as her brows moved into a complicated expression and her mouth opened and closed several times. She started rocking back and forth slowly. She bit her lip and closed her eyes. Then it seemed like she shuddered one last time before going unconscious there on the floor.

Fuck! I think I broke Lina. I may have traumatized her. Was she so shocked that she passed out? Was she shaking in rage? That definitely looked like a rage shake there, but I couldn't tell. She was kind of glaring at me for a few seconds. *Damn! What have I done to poor Lina?* I didn't even let her know she was getting a new body before I just kinda dropped her into a weird situation.

I picked her up and moved her from that spot. I laid her down over by Leera. I would just pretend this didn't happen

when she awoke. I'm sure the last thing she remembered was falling asleep on my chest, so maybe she would just think it was a dream or something. She murmured, "Boss... I..." before blushing one last time in her sleep.

I feel like this is going to be awkward later. I wondered if I should talk to Leera about this after I restored her. Yeah, it's best to be honest in situations like these, I believe. I would tell her everything. I had already set the expectation that she might not be my only mate before I gave her a body.

I grabbed the feathers I had sat aside for Leera and sat next to her. I attached them to her head on the left front side with her bangs. I converted the feathers into hair, then converted her long black hair to have the same mana-gathering capabilities. I melded my finger to her shoulder and gave her all the improvements from the wendigo.

Her eyes I decided to make a warm hazel color, as adding the wendigo functions automatically added yellow. I added a path from her lungs to her bone spikes. This would enable her to exhale the fog through them while endlessly inhaling through her nose and mouth. It also had the strange side effect of enabling her to breath through her bone spikes. I could only think of one benefit to that, but we didn't have a hot tub here. I fused her hearts together and was able to give her Mana Regeneration of around 7 mana per hour. With the mana-gathering from her hair, she might be able to use magic fairly often.

I remember reading an article about a knife that could inject a freezing gas into its victims, literally stopping them dead.

I looked at the soul panel and with much regret dragged the cold infusion magic onto Leera's soul. That one seemed really awesome; I had kind of wanted to keep it for myself. I already had offensive magic, however, and she only had self-healing.

With this improvement I wouldn't need to go hunting for her. Instead I would gather magical abilities that she would

find useful and maybe get her some weapon training.

I took a step back to compare my work between Leera and Lina.

Leera had a thin, lithe body, stressing speed and flexibility over strength. There were no large clusters of muscle, which gave her a naturally graceful appearance when she moved. Her breasts were on the small side but seemed to complement her frame, which I had made to be slender and petite. I looked longingly up and down her body. The only way you could get this kind of body in my old world would be doing six hours of yoga a day before running a marathon. Her hair looked unique now that her bangs had white and red strands on one side. The colors stood out in contrast to her black hair, natural eyeliner, and long dark eyelashes but set off her red lips.

Lina on the other hand was very muscular, which contradicted her personality in a delightful way. It made it almost irresistible to tease her. She also had that mature sexiness that a well-developed woman should have.

For once I was grateful to be a flesh golem and to have Fleshcrafting level 5. Now I could do in minutes what it used to take me hours to accomplish. I guess it didn't hurt things that Mors basically acted like an overclocked supercomputer to handle the symmetry and shape of things as I Blended them, whereas the book fairy had barely helped at all. I wondered, was Mors made out of me, or was she put together out of the souls inside me like the book fairy was? I decided to ask.

I closed my eyes.

"Mors?"

Mors appeared and performed her usual curtsy and nod.

"What are you made out of?"

"I will try my best to answer that, Master, but it's not easy to put into words."

She took a few moments to think before speaking again in a professional way.

"I am basically a composite of the personalities stored in you that had the traits you chose when creating me. I am also a part of your will, so that makes me a part of you, as well. When you named me, it seemed to resonate with a few of the souls inside me, and they willfully merged with me to better serve you. I think I have a bit of your ancient god inside me, as well. I have consumed many souls that attempted disobey or control you before they could do anything, which quickly forced the rest of them into submission."

She resumed her normal posture and asked, "Is there anything else I can do for you Master?"

"No, Mors, keep up the good work! If I could give you a raise I would." I replied with a smile.

She returned my smile politely and faded away.

I opened my eyes.

Lina was awake. She was sitting there examining her new body. When she noticed that I was looking at her, she quickly wrapped herself in her wings as the blush returned to her cheeks.

She stood up and started to speak. "B... Boss, I'm going to go out for a minute if you don't mind."

She quickly headed for the exit without waiting for my reply. She ran awkwardly, as she wasn't quite used to her body just yet. She didn't even seem to notice the wendigo in the doorway in her mad dash to escape.

Yeah, I think she's probably freaked out to say the least.

I dragged Leera's soul over her body. There was much we needed to talk about, and honestly I needed to relieve the tightness in my pants again. Pervy Guy was becoming a real burden on me, and although Leera thoroughly enjoyed it, I was sure she wanted to do other things every now and then.

Chapter 19: A Surprise Awakening — Lina

I sat in my favorite tree outside the cave, though now I had to perch on a larger limb. I tried to make sense of the events of the last few hours.

I remember feeling tired. I remember waiting for the boss to lie down. It took me a while to work up the courage to make a move, but when he rolled over on his back I figured it was a good opportunity. Even if I couldn't mate with the boss, I could at least cuddle close to him.

I crawled up onto his chest, careful not to hurt him with my claws. I lay down, and to my surprise he started rubbing my head. It felt amazing. He was touching me and paying attention to me, being so gentle. I started to fall asleep in that perfect moment.

When I felt his finger pull away, I didn't want it to stop. I grabbed it and pulled it back. I wanted it to last longer.

I felt him pull away again. This time I wasn't letting him escape. I pulled his hand over me, and to my surprise he cradled me in his warmth, holding me close to him. I could feel his heart beating through his chest and hear him breathing as I fell asleep in his blissful embrace.

The next thing I remember is waking up with a shock. Something — no, everything — felt different.

My head was swimming, and there was a wetness between my legs. Why was I nude? I grabbed onto something. This is Boss's harness. I looked up to see the boss looking down at me with lust-filled eyes. I felt my cheeks heat up. I was straddling something — was that his...? I rubbed myself along it while he looked into my eyes.

I reached down to steady myself, and it twitched. That startled me. I didn't know they did that. I fell backwards into something wet. It seemed kind of familiar; I lifted my hand to smell it. The realization of what it was hit me. This was

his seed! I knew that from watching him with Leera. I had rubbed myself with it last night while I was between their legs. It had felt so naughty to be there knowing I could get caught by him completely exposed and covered in his seed. And now I was sitting in it with him gazing intently at me. I felt like I was in a dream.

Did he do this while I was on his lap? Did I make him do this? I had a shocking realization. *What if this is real?* I covered my body quickly with my wings — *were* these my wings? I didn't even care; I needed to finish. I needed him to see me as I finished.

I brought the seed-covered hand down, smearing it across my body, and began to furiously rub myself. I wouldn't break eye contact. I needed him to watch. I started breathing heavily, then it happened. It *really* happened. It was so intense I bit my lip; I couldn't stop it. I could feel my heart beating far too fast as the pleasure overtook me and spasms racked my body, all while he watched me as I came for him.

The next thing I remembered was waking up by Leera. Boss was sitting across from me with his eyes closed. I smelled my hand again. *It really happened! It wasn't a dream! This is terrible, how can I ever look him in the eyes now without thinking about what I did in front of him?* I looked down at my hand. I didn't remember it being this dark. Was I sitting? *Wow, I'm tall now.* I looked down at my feet. No, these are different: larger, sharper, and black. I felt between my legs. I was still naked, and now I had hair there.

I looked across to Boss. He was staring at me again. Everything I had done came back to me. My cheeks felt like they were on fire. I was so embarrassed. I had to get out of there. I told him I was going out and made a speedy retreat.

Without thinking, I spread my wings as soon as I was outside, and to my surprise I was actually able to take off without climbing anything first.

I noticed just how much bigger I was when I saw the tree. It seemed smaller now.

I just kept sitting there, going over everything again and again in my head. My emotions seem to be hanging somewhere between total embarrassment and arousal. Did that mean I'm turned on by being embarrassed? What if it wasn't just the boss that saw me last night, but Leera also? Would she have punished me for it?

I shuddered again and sighed heavily. *What is happening? Is that smoke? Did I just breathe out smoke? No, it doesn't really have any smell.* I shot out a bone spike. *These things are long! They seem sharper and thinner now, as well.* I wanted to test them out. I wondered if Bob had gotten a new body like this. Maybe he was already out here hunting somewhere, having fun stabbing things. I felt bad about telling him I couldn't be his mate, but to me he would always be my crazy big brother.

I scanned my surroundings looking for something to kill. My vision turned yellow. I saw a red blob several feet away. I flew quickly towards it. *Hey, it's one of those huge gopher things again.* I smashed into its back and buried my spike all the way through it, pinning it to the ground. I stabbed it with my other spike and injected it; it felt different somehow. It immediately stopped moving. I withdrew both spikes and picked the thing up. It was still breathing. Its eyes looked at me, terrified, but it didn't struggle. I thought these things were huge, but it now only came up to my waist while I held it by the scruff.

I have definitely gotten bigger. Wait! Does this mean? Could he have made it so I am able to mate with him? But he has Leera. Does this mean he wants me, too? That we can finally make a family?

I dropped the gopher and rushed toward the cave. I had to gather my resolve and find out for myself.

I jumped into the air, my newly powerful legs giving me a boost as I took flight. My heart was beating fast in

anticipation. If this was true, then my world had changed. I would have everything I ever wanted.

Ow! My wing! Something hit me; I was losing altitude. I saw a tree quickly approaching and couldn't avoid it. I put my arms out to try to soften the blow that I knew was coming. I hit the tree head-on. I was falling. Limbs and branches were tearing at me as I descended at a frightening speed. I landed on my back, knocking the wind from my lungs. I lay there gasping for a moment as I looked over to my wing. There was an arrow coming out of it. Someone was hunting me! I quickly stood up, coughing. I thought I had broken one of my arms in the fall because it wouldn't move like I wanted it to.

I got behind the tree, bringing my wing around. I tried to pull out the arrow. It hurt. It hurt! I couldn't do it. The barbed head was impossible to pull out with the coordination I had in one arm, at least not without destroying my wing. Blood was dripping down my feathers. I felt tears running down my face. Just when I got everything I wanted, this had to happen. *I have to make it back to Boss. I can't let myself die here.* I thought about detecting prey, and my vision went yellow again. I saw a large red blob in the bushes to the right of the cave entrance.

I needed cover. I tried to make that smoke come out like I did earlier. I was surprised that I was able to breathe out continuously now. The area around me quickly filled with the strange mist. I saw the blob start to move. It was a familiar shape. A goblin! This one looked smaller than the bodies I had seen. It was around my height.

It was running towards me while using the bushes and trees as cover, but I could still see it as a red blob.

It was moving closer at a fast pace. I had to dart around the tree, placing it between me and the goblin's line of fire.

It was at the bush right in front of me, then it was on the other side of the tree. I was ready to extend my spike into it

when it came closer. It tensed up like it would charge, but instead it just fell forward, landing face down on the ground.

I waited a few minutes to see if it would get back up before I carefully crept up closer. I shot out a spike from my good arm and stabbed it in the shoulder, injecting everything I had into it.

I scanned the area for anything I might have missed. This was my first time being the prey instead of the hunter, and I didn't want to let it happen again. Other than a few small blobs in the trees and the gopher from earlier, there didn't seem to be anything else.

I rolled the goblin over. Its eyes were frantic and kept darting around as if looking for an escape. I popped out my spike and placed the tip right in front of its nose. The goblin stared at it cross-eyed. I debated killing it, but I hadn't seen Bob anywhere. *What if they captured him, what if they ate him? What if I've already lost my brother?* No, I had to take this guy to the boss. I already knew he could talk to you even if you're dead, but pain could be a great motivator. This goblin had taught me that.

I grabbed onto one of its oversized ears and began to slowly drag it toward the cave. It seemed to be flinching in pain as I pulled. I kept scanning the area as I entered the clearing in front of the cave opening. My wing hurt so much that it was almost unbearable. My arm was the only thing distracting me from it as I felt the bones grinding in it with each step.

I could hear moans of pleasure coming from the cave as I entered. I noticed a truly monstrous creature laying by the door. *What the hell is this thing?* I released the goblin.

I cradled my arm with my hand as my wing dragged on the floor. I saw the boss sitting up against the left wall. Leera was on top of him. I called out to them.

They stopped their motions and looked over to me. Boss had a shocked expression that quickly turned to fury when he saw the arrow. He tried to get up, but Leera held him

down. He looked up at her with a confused expression, rage briefly flashing across his face before he calmed a bit.

Leera gestured for me to come over. I walked slowly towards them, wincing with each step. But Boss was there. I made it back to him. I was here now. I could feel the tears flowing freely as I walked a little faster.

As I got close, Boss's expression turned into a gentle look of concern. He picked me up softly, being careful not to touch my wing.

"I'll start fixing you immediately. Just relax, you're safe now." His voice was softer than I remember it being.

Leera stopped him. "I think it's better if I do it. She needs a gentle touch."

Boss turned me to face her. Leera held the arrow steady on one side, and Boss broke off the barbed end. Leera pulled it out in one swift motion without me even feeling it slide through. She gently held my arm in place and tilted my head towards hers.

She looked me in the eyes as boss lifted me towards her. She put her lips over my face in one of those... kisses, I think they're called. I gasped in surprise, fog was coming from her mouth. As I inhaled it I could feel the pain disappear. Boss gently placed his finger on my arm and I could feel it shifting back into place. He ran his hand along my wing and it returned to normal.

They both held me between them for a while. Leera was looking at me with compassion and Boss was looking at me with pride.

"You've done well, Lina, my little amazon," he said as he ran his fingers over my hair.

He turned me around in his arms so that I was facing him. He held me by the shoulders, while Leera supported my bottom in her hands. It was his turn to kiss me now. I could feel my whole body heating up. Wasn't this what he does before he mates? I could smell a heavy musk coming

from where they were still joined. I felt myself get aroused from the thought.

I shot a worried glance at Leera, but she was just smiling down at me. She ran a finger down my spine and I shivered.

Boss had a truly lusty look in his eyes as he let his gaze wash over my unclothed body. Oh god, he must have known what I did earlier while he was watching me.

Leera spoke from behind me as if reading my mind. "While you were out we talked, among other things. He was worried about traumatizing you by awakening you the way he did. He was worried that you would hate him. I gave him a different version of events, and now, looking at you blushing and feeling how soaked my hand is getting, I have no doubt mine is the real version."

She moved her finger just slightly, causing me to let out a small whimper.

"That was very bold of you, you know. Doing something like that right in front of him while sitting in his seed. You can bear him children now after all. You may already be with child." She said this in a mocking tone as I felt one of her fingertips starting to rub me.

I couldn't believe it. Did he really make it so I could bear his children? I started to moan and tried to move my arms to embrace him, but he held them firmly and didn't let go.

I moved one of my legs up, grabbing his harness with my talon as I felt one of Leera's fingers enter me.

Leera leaned closer, breathing heavily into my ear from behind.

She whispered. "Don't think I don't know about last night, as well. You might have thought you were sneaky, but it didn't take me long to guess what was happening between our legs."

She inserted another one of her slender fingers. I grasped the harness with both talons now as she started to moan into my ear.

She began grinding faster, as she worked the length of her fingers in and out of me. He raised me up towards his mouth, sucking one of my breasts. I looked back at Leera, she was still smiling, but now she had a sadistic look in her eyes. She switched back to supporting me with one hand. She brought her fingers to her mouth, parting her perfect red lips and licked them while watching me. She moved her hand back down and I felt a finger entering me again. I felt something tickling me somewhere else as well.

No, she wouldn't, not in front of the boss, it's too humiliating. Her other finger entered my other hole with some difficulty. The pain was intense, but somehow lessened by how excited I felt. I looked at boss again and his eyes were watching as he continued to suck me. I felt a ripple of pleasure running through me, causing my body to heat up. I looked down to see my juices running down his abdomen and pooling where he and Leera were connected.

I knew I was going to come soon. I struggled uselessly against the boss's strong grip. My hips started shaking. I felt Leera tense up as her fingers became stiff. The boss sucked harder as he closed his eyes. Leera stopped moving her hips and started jerking uncontrollably, her voice loud behind me.

She let her hands drop, as she sat there still shaking. She leaned forward and the boss lowered me down to sit in Leera's lap.

I was so close to finishing. I started to reach my hand down between my legs but the boss stopped me.

"I didn't give you permission to do that." He said in a firm tone that raised goosebumps along my skin.

Leera leaned in. She and boss kissed each other deeply for several seconds until parting. Leera moved me forward to sit in the boss's lap as she sat up, seed dripped down her leg. The smell of it was intoxicating.

Boss was definitely still hard. I could feel it resting on my back. It twitched knocking me forward as something warm and wet pooled in my crack. Leera laughed as she spoke in a breathless voice. "You see, there's no way one woman can deal with all that. I haven't even had the time to eat yet. A strong man needs to spread his seed with strong women. That's the reality here, we must grow our flock, and protect each other. I think John is the strongest man I have ever seen, he's also the most caring. I want us all to be a family."

She sat back on boss's thighs spreading her legs as more seed spilled from her. She motioned for me to come over. I crawled over, glancing longingly at the boss's gift as I went. I felt a slap on my ass. I looked back to see the Boss smiling at me. Leera guided me between her legs and said. "I want him to watch while you clean me with your mouth." I felt another wave of pleasure wash over me. This was so demeaning, I was so embarrassed. Somehow it only made me more eager.

I was still right on the edge of finishing even though nothing was touching me. I licked his seed from her thigh, gradually moving towards her swollen womanhood. I placed my face at her opening and started to lick her. She moaned again, and I felt a shift as the boss pulled her closer forcing my face deeper. I backed up only to feel something pressing into me from behind.

He kept pulling her closer and I was forced to keep backing up. Is this really his... This is happening! I'm finally going to be one with him. I'll finally get to feel his seed

pouring inside me. I wonder if he'll be rough. I fought the urge to come. I didn't want to finish before he did. I felt it enter, even if it was only a little bit. He kept pulling her towards him making me force more and more of him inside me. It was painful and beautiful at the same time. I moaned into Leera. It just kept going in. I wasn't even all the way back yet. I felt him reach my depths. It was all I could take, but he kept pulling her into me until I had to try to sit up.

I felt him reach up grabbing my hips and forcing me back even more. I could feel my insides straining against him. Tears started building in my eyes. There was a lot of pain now, but the pleasure dwarfed it. He raised me up. My knees bent and my talons touched the floor. He began to move me up and down. I felt every centimeter of it with my entire being. Whenever he would raise me I felt like a part of me was pulled out. Leera looked amazed.

She spoke. "Look, you can see it inside her." He throbbed inside me, causing me to gasp.

He turned me around to face him, twisting my insides around his shaft. I sat there impaled on him, not even half of it was inside me. He looked at me as if in a strange mix of pleasure and pain. He ordered me to move. I struggled to get my legs back under myself. I was squatting over him with him filling every part of me. I shakily raised myself up until only the tip was inside me. Then with all my weight I slid back down again. He gasped and closed his eyes, seeming to savor the feeling of being inside me. I felt him throb again.

I resisted the urge to orgasm. Soon I'll be heavy with his child I have to savor this first time. With my legs shaking heavily I raised back up again, then slid down slowly this time. I felt him start to pulse inside me. He grabbed my

shoulders and pushed me down the rest of the way hitting me deeply and holding me there. I felt a warm rush of liquid flowing from him into me.

I came hard, pulling my legs up into my chest and wrapping his hands with my wings as I shook uncontrollably. I felt his seed spilling from me with every pulse which only caused me to spasm in answer. We remained connected for a while as he filled me. My orgasm still wouldn't relent as I clamped down on him. We looked into each other's eyes once more as we marveled in our shared pleasure. Even if he hadn't said it, I could tell from the look in his eyes that he cared for me.

My legs went limp and just rested on him. His orgasm slowly subsided, and I could feel him start to deflate. I slumped forward on him as I clenched my muscles to keep him inside me. I locked my legs straight, trapping his member between my thighs. I didn't want to let go. I always wanted him inside of me. Now that I had that, I didn't want to lose this feeling.

Every time I clenched he made a cute whimper. I was now his mate. He would use me to make his babies. He would love me and cherish me as we raised our children together.

I imagined the life I would have as he started to gently stroke my hair. I could feel my exhaustion taking me. I relaxed and finally allowed myself to rest as a warm feeling spread from my chest throughout my body.

Chapter 20: The Hunt — John

Lina just lay against me, leaning on my abdomen as she caught her breath.

I looked at Leera she gave me a happy, knowing look. I scooped Lina up in my arms. She tiredly opened her eyes for a second before closing them once more. I could feel her pulse still racing as she continued to breath heavily.

I had told Leera everything — even about what had happened when I was creating Lina's new body. She wasn't surprised or judgmental. She seemed to understand me on an instinctual level. I had barely known her, but I already knew I had feelings for her.

She revealed what had happened when we had passed out last night, and I was shocked. I remember Bob telling me that Lina probably wasn't going to be his girl, but I didn't know it went this deep.

When she'd told me her theory about what had happened during Lina's reawakening, everything made sense all at once. Lina was an exhibitionist and a masochist, probably because she couldn't be honest with me. So I had to force her to do what she already wanted to do.

Leera on the other hand was honest, understanding, and had a maturity to her that is hard to find. She was level-headed and smart. You couldn't ask for a better partner.

Right now it's fairly likely that they are both going to be giving birth within the next year or so. Actually, Lina might lay an egg in a month, and it could hatch anywhere between one and three months if I remembered bird facts correctly. My child with her would most likely have her traits, but that could be a moot point as I could always change them with Fleshcrafting.

Holy shit! Just how many children am I going to have? Seven to fourteen kids a year? That's horrifying. I might be

unleashing a plague upon the land. Whether or not it's fertilized, I'm guessing Lina will still lay at least one egg a month, which she will feel obligated to incubate.

I thought about it for a few seconds before I chuckled lightly. That means she will likely spend most of her life roosting. Basically just sitting on an egg, likely while blushing at me any time I look her way. I will have to figure out a way to make her a flesh construct that exists mainly to generate body heat so she's not stuck sitting in one place forever.

But wow, this was amazing. I had never had a threesome before, let alone the fantasy version I got today. As much as I knew I had feelings for Leera, I knew I also felt for Lina just the same. She had always charmed me. Her combination of adorable and stoic was irresistible. I remembered the way it felt to be inside her, and I felt my brain melt a little. I found my pants and put them on.

I remembered she came in dragging something. I looked around. I was still cradling Lina in my arms. She was definitely larger now. She seems to have fallen asleep with a grin on her face. I walked over to Leera and handed Lina off to her. I walked toward the cave entrance. *Damn! She bagged a goblin.* I had already been pretty sure that was what she had, given that the arrow resembled the ones I had pulled out from myself earlier.

Its ear was partially ripped off, and it was bleeding from its shoulder. I saw its chest rising and falling. Was it still breathing? I sat it up and pulled its arms behind its back. I used Fleshcrafting to seal the wrist skin together. I did the same with its ankles. She must have kept it alive for a reason. I would ask her about that once she'd had an opportunity to rest.

I peeked outside to see if there were any other threats. I used Life Sense. I saw a fair-sized blob not too far away. I crept quietly, trying to stick to the tree line after I got out of the clearing.

Yay! This marks a historical event — the first time I've made it more than three steps outside of that cave. I felt that pulling sensation calling to me again and looked at my map. It seemed to be telling me to head northeast of the goblin camp. I decided to ignore it for now. I had to make sure the area was safe.

I moved towards the blob. Now that I was closer I could see it wasn't that large. I picked it up. Ah, this was one of those large gophers. It looked at me as I held it, which freaked me out a little. I promptly skewered it in the head with my spike.

I brought it back to the cave and started using Fleshcrafting to skin it. I melded together all the rodent skin that was present and formed a new, slightly skimpy outfit for Lina. Something like a fur swimsuit again, though it was still a bit gooey on the back. It needed to sit awhile before I could finish it.

That gopher was fresher than the ones earlier were, and to be honest I kind of wanted her to be naked for a little while longer anyway. After what had just happened, it wasn't like we were going to be uncomfortable with each other.

I took the meat over to Leera and handed it to her. I knew she had to be hungry. Damn my lack of survivalism, though — I didn't know how exactly to build a fire to cook it. I wasn't sure she would want to eat it raw, as she had been excited about being able to roast meat like a human now.

Due to my Feast skill, I didn't have to cook things for myself, and Bob and Lina had always just eaten everything raw anyway. Leera didn't look pleased. She gently sat Lina down and took the meat. I laid Lina's new outfit beside her.

Leera looked up at me and said, "Oh, really, you'll give her clothes, but you expect me to walk around naked all the time."

I didn't even know she knew about the concept of clothing.

I winked at her and replied, "Oh, you know you like it."

She raised one eyebrow at me, alternating her glances from me to the rodent. "I really think we should cook this. Isn't that what people normally do? I've seen humans do that regularly in my flights."

I also raised one eyebrow and replied, "We're not exactly human."

Which was true — I had imparted all the benefits of the ghoulish stomach to everyone, as well as the wendigo stomach. Technically we didn't need to produce waste.

Not finding a reply for that, she shrugged and raised the gopher to her mouth and took a small bite. She covered her mouth with her other hand and made a satisfied face while she was chewing. After swallowing, she said, "You're right, this is good. But still, I would like to try cooked meat some day. I think it might be even tastier." She licked her lips at me.

I wondered just what parts of my memory Mors accessed to teach everybody English.

I responded, "I've had it several times before, but the first thing I ate in this world was a lot of unidentifiable decaying meat, which, when I look back on it, tasted okay. So, yeah, I think we may need to upgrade our diet, but for right now this will do."

I walked over and picked up the sleeping Lina then made my way once more towards the cave exit.

I peered back at Leera and said, "Leera, I'm going hunting so we can bring Bob back. Keep an eye on that goblin, and don't let it do anything weird."

Leera looked back between bites. "Okay, I'll try to hold everything together here while you're out."

She laid down her food and walked over to me, hugging me with Lina between us. She looked up at me expectantly. I leaned down, and she kissed me while gently placing a hand on my cheek. She looked deeply into my eyes.

"John, please come back safely," she said as she let her hand slip from my face.

"I will." I awkwardly replied as I left.

Wow, this is the first time a girl this hot had ever treated me like that. This has escalated quickly! Not that I minded. If marriage was a thing here, I would definitely propose to her and Lina both. Once we were staying some place nicer than this cave and I had all the materials, I would make them both wedding dresses.

I had to be careful out here, as I had found out several times already, and doubly so because I was carrying Lina. Now that I thought about it, this might not have been the best decision. Lina is our little huntress, though, and if things got bad I had full faith she could defend herself or escape.

As I walked I felt that nagging pulling sensation again. I felt like I was being called somewhere. I turned to face it. Though at this point I knew it was something I would have to investigate, it would have to wait for now. Bob had priority. I wanted to get my friend back as soon as I could.

I had heard people talk about hunting before, and what I gathered was that it was basically just finding a hiding place and waiting. If that was all I was doing, then there was no reason to wake Lina yet.

I kept my vigilance as I walked deeper into the forest. I checked my mini-map to ensure I wasn't heading toward the goblin camp, which was apparently not too far, as they keep showing up here.

I worried about Leera, but the cave is dark to normal eyes, and she could freeze them with a poke of her spike. After I had told her about her updated abilities, she had immediately shot out her spike and started pumping out mist, just to see it in action. Then, to my surprise, instead of just normally using self-heal, she used fog to heal herself once she had retracted her spike.

I had asked her why she had chosen to do it that way, and she answered that it actually felt less draining. So now I guessed she'd made herself a new skill, which I dubbed Healing Mist. In that form, it doesn't damage me, as it never reaches my core. As long as I don't inhale too much of it and don't enter undead mode, I assumed I would be safe.

Now that I had decent mana regen, I was looking forward to using my spells a little. I still hadn't really had the chance to test them.

Looking at my map, I headed toward a stream. Living things have to drink, after all, at least if they don't have ghoulish stomachs, but ghouls themselves weren't living. So I guess our group was the only exception.

I found an area with a large tree that had toppled over. I walked over to its stump and crouched behind it.

I could hear water in the distance. I looked down at Lina, who was still wrapped in her wings and cradled to my chest. I held her in one arm and reached down to gently rub her little nose. She scrunched up her face and brought her hand up from behind her wing to wipe at her nose. She tucked her arm back in and cuddled up close again, shifting around to get more comfortable. I tickled her nose again.

Ow! I pulled my finger back quickly. She bit me, and it really hurt! I had forgotten that I had given her all those sharp teeth. Looking back at our fun time earlier, Leera may be the bravest person I know. I wonder if she had to heal herself after that.

She smacked her lips a few times and seemed to relax again. *All right, so you want to play hardball, huh?* I reached my hand up under her wings until I found the place I was looking for. I gave her a poke and my finger entered some place wet. Her eyes went wide and she shot me a look of confusion that gradually became one of arousal as she figured out what had happened.

She released a small moan as I began to move my finger in and out of her. She opened her wings revealing her

beauty as I brought her up to kiss her. I traced my tongue down her body, making sure to lick and tease her nipples. I moved my tongue down her abs to her wet spot. I picked her up and spread her legs bringing her entrance to my mouth. I ran my tongue along each of her lips before attacking her clit.

Her hand grasped my wrist as her legs wrapped around my face pulling me closer. I removed my slick finger and gently pressed it into her ass. She squeezed my head with her her thighs so hard I thought she may crush me.

I felt her muscles fighting against the sudden intrusion before they relaxed and I was able to slide in and out of her with ease. I began to lick faster as I felt her legs start to shake. Her anus was rhythmically clamping down on my finger as her body grew hot against me.

I knew she was close as her fingers dug into my wrist. She started to twitch as her orgasm began to overtake her.

I removed her from my face and laid her down as she screamed in pleasure. She looked into my eyes as if to ensure I was watching as she lay there awkwardly spasming on the forest floor.

She gave me a look of total helplessness and embarrassment as she gradually recovered herself and stood to her feet. She took up a powerful stance as if that didn't just happen and looked up to me as she wrapped herself in her wings.

She made a pouty face, then noticed that she wasn't in the cave. "Where are we, Boss?"

I smiled down at her and replied, "No, you call me John now. We're beyond this whole Boss thing. We're in the forest; we need to hunt big game in order to make Bob a new body."

She nodded for a second, then seemed confused. "Did something happen to Bob? Now that I think about it, I haven't seen him."

I informed her about the whole wendigo event and how Bob had requested to have a new body made for him.

She shuddered and brought her hands to her face. After composing herself a bit she responded. "Poor Bob, and this whole time I haven't even noticed. I just thought he was hunting." Her eyes started to well up with tears. She closed her eyes for a moment then wiped them.

"For Bob!" she said as she balled her little hand into a fist.

"Yes, for Bob!" I replied with gusto. Oops. Yelling is the opposite of good hunting.

I gave her head a pat then kissed her on the forehead. Ah, there's that blush.

"All right, my little amazon, you go and scout in the trees by the lake. Come and get me when you find something big enough, and I'll deal with it." I said as I stood up.

She unfurled her wings and I got a glimpse of her nude form again. I could almost swear that she turned a darker red before hopping up and flying off toward the river.

Huh, I guess she doesn't need to climb a tree first now — I did better than I expected.

I heard some noise behind me and turned my head to see something resembling a large squirrel running down a tree. It was about ten feet away. I slowly crept toward it. It seemed to be busily eating a nut of some sort and didn't notice me. When I was about six feet away, it looked up at me. Time to try the wendigo's coercion. I felt energy flowing into my eyes. It stopped mid-chomp, its small mouth hanging open.

"You, bring me the nut." I commanded.

It just kept sitting there stupefied. Oh, yeah, woodland critters can't speak, so they probably can't understand, either. I mentally pictured it bringing the nut over to me. It started walking over with the nut in its hands. When it got close it offered it up to me. I took the nut and examined it. *Hmm.* It looked like a walnut mixed with an acorn, as it has

a little cup on the top. I pulled off the little cup part and placed it on the squirrel's head.

"All right, sergeant, you've been promoted. Now salute!" I said in a mock military voice.

I pictured it saluting and the little critter did it. I laughed to myself for a while, but I had business with the sergeant here that needed attending to. *I think we're supposed to be able to share information somehow.*

I mentally pictured a bear and tried to relay my need to find it. The sergeant tilted his head, knocking his little hat off, then sent me an image of something terrifying.

It looked similar to a bear in size and shape, but its muzzle was pushed in close to its face. It had two curly tusks jutting from its lower jaw. It turned and I saw its profile. Its hind legs were powerful-looking, reverse-jointed things that I would imagine gave it the ability to leap. Yeah, bears were tame when compared to this thing. I could only imagine that if it stood up it would be nearly ten feet tall.

I mentally pictured picking the hat up and putting it back on. The sergeant complied. I then thought, *Where?* The sergeant took off like a flash, holding his little hat in place while he ran. I followed him, running at a fair pace. It didn't take us long before the creek was in sight. We ran along its edges until he ducked back into the forest. I followed him, running through the forest for a while parallel to the shore but at a good distance.

We finally seemed to reach our destination. It scurried up a tree. *Oh no, I'm way too large for that.* I used Life Sense and saw two massive blobs in the distance close to where the creek was. I mentally released the sergeant and made my way towards them, while trying to be as quiet as possible. I moved closer and caught a glimpse of them from behind a tree. They were indeed massive.

They were sitting on a bank facing away from me, the larger one swatting at fish and the smaller watching.

I thought about how best to tackle the situation. I reached to my back to grab my weapon. Oh yeah, I probably should have brought that. I facepalmed. The ears on the small one twitched and it turned its head in my direction. I held my breath and hoped it didn't notice me.

After a few minutes, it lost interest and decided to try its luck at fish-swatting. I heard a rustling in the tree above me and saw Lina high up in the branches. *Okay good, I think we have a chance here.*

I considered sneaking, but after the facepalm incident I was pretty sure it would hear me before I got close enough to do anything. I decided to walk out cautiously and gauge their reactions.

I walked out from behind my tree and approached them slowly.

The little one was the first to turn around, and the larger one followed suit. As the larger one saw me, it roared and moved in front of the smaller one. I took another step closer and it charged.

Sure enough, those legs allowed them to jump. It was only a few feet away from me before I knew it. I used Dark Tendrils to slow it briefly before the tendrils strained and ripped apart. I used Weakness. It stopped momentarily and looked back at the smaller one before resuming its charge. It was snarling and moving too much to use Petrifying Gaze, so it came to a melee.

It leaped again and was on me, knocking me to the ground. I was able to grab its throat with one hand and push it back. I punched its face and felt the bones crack as one of its tusks broke off in my knuckle. I maneuvered my arm to the soft part of its neck and shot my spike as its claws raked the side of my head. I felt its dead weight on me as it stopped moving.

I quickly rolled it off and prepared to fight the smaller one. But instead I just saw Lina standing on its body, looking

at me with an expression like, "What took you so long?" I mended my minor injuries.

I used Soul Steal.

I examined their souls to see what could be gained. They actually did have skills, fishing and foraging. I decided I could probably use those at some point and took them. The other soul had the same skills. I would give them to Lina, but I wanted her to stay alive, and I can only give them in soul form. I guessed I could give them to Bob, so I did.

I started dragging the bigger one. I would have to come back later for the smaller one. I didn't feel comfortable leaving Leera alone with a goblin, and dragging two of them would slow me down considerably. I marked its location on my map.

The trip back was uneventful for the most part. Lina killed something resembling a large fanged bobcat and was now dragging it behind her.

As we entered the cave I was greeted by a strange sight. Leera had her arm around a sobbing goblin, rubbing his head and shushing him.

I dropped the bear-thing and looked at her quizzically. She looked up at me and smiled as the small goblin continued blubbering with snot and tears streaming down its face.

I looked at it for a while before it seemed to notice I was in the room. Its ear was no longer torn, and its shoulder was no longer bleeding.

Its expression changed from one of sadness to one of worry as it went quiet.

"Leera, a word please." I said as I walked toward the back of the cave.

She gently released the goblin and started to walk toward me. The goblin's lips quivered and it looked like it was suppressing another crying fit. Its eyes met Lina's, however, and it went still.

Lina just looked at it with a perplexed expression, but her muscles were tensed and it seemed like she would attack it if it moved again.

Leera came over next to me and put her hand on my chest as she hugged me from the side.

"Leera, what's going on with the goblin?" I asked in a hushed tone.

"You know, goblins can't speak English. We could have talked about this right over there," she joked.

I slapped her ass and she yelped. "Smart-ass, answer the question." I said.

She rubbed her butt and gave me a brief smile before her eyes turned sad as she spoke. "You know how we're made of goblins, right? Well, I think this is their son. He came this way while looking for his parents."

Wow, that hit me like a rock. I hadn't felt guilty even once since coming to this world, but now I felt like a murderer. *No, I wasn't in the wrong here. They were trying to kill me. Wait, how did she even communicate with him? Oh right, she was mentally half-goblin.*

All right, I'll see if I can't go and at least talk to him. Maybe I can give him some comfort. But first I'm pretty sure Lina deserves to know this as well.

I gestured her over. Lina came running with a clack-clack noise. When she reached me, I brought her up to speed. Her face turned sour, then gradually softened into an expression of contemplation. I gave her a pat on the head, which seemed to make her feel better.

I walked over to the goblin youth and knelt down. I threw his stone knife across the room and began unmelding his skin with Fleshcrafting. He winced as I worked. Apparently this was not a pleasant process for him.

He drew his knees up to his chin and stared at me with fear in his eyes.

I sat cross-legged in front of him and spoke in the simple goblin language. "Why you shooting Lina?" I gestured my

hand toward her.

He looked over and replied, "I not know! I thought was weird bird. Might taste good."

I sighed, and some fog came out as I did so. The goblin seemed to recoil slightly. My fog didn't really have any effect, though I suppose I could infuse it with Weakness if I wanted to.

I recounted the story about what happened to his parents and pointed out Lina and Leera to show what they had been reincarnated into. The goblin seemed to have a hard time understanding it.

I walked over and picked up what was left of the skinned gopher. I Fleshcrafted a tiny hairless bear, no bigger than a fingertip. It was like the ones I was used to, not those huge ones that live here, though without fur it was still ugly.

I opened the soul panel and dragged the monstrous bear soul over it.

The goblin looked on in shock as the tiny bear ran around my hand. I poked it with a finger and it started swiping at it. I handed it to him.

"Here, pet for you." I said as he nervously took it from me before setting it softly on the ground and watching in wonder as it ran away.

I pointed to the monstrous bear that I had dragged in and told him this little one was the same one.

Some of it seemed to click as he looked at Leera again.

Leera came over and sat next to me. She tucked her multi-colored hair behind her left ear and began speaking goblin. She explained that she thought she was probably his mother, and she's very happy now, so everything's okay.

Lina came over and sat on my other side. I could see that she was still taken aback a bit by all this. She also spoke in goblin. She explained that she didn't remember her old life, but from her brief time as a soul she could tell that she was very unhappy with herself and never felt right. She talked a

lot about how glad she is now to be what she is, and how happy I make her.

The goblin stared at the floor for awhile. His lip quivered and he looked from Leera to Lina as he began to cry again.

We gave him some time as he sat there quietly sobbing.

He looked as if he was still trying to make sense of all this new information. He looked up at me as his tears stopped, and I gave him a pat on the head.

He no longer had a look of fear in his eyes. He now wore a look of reverence. He seemed awestruck.

He began speaking after a long silence. "You be one of gods?"

I put my hand up to my chin and thought. *How do I answer this?* To really explain what I am would be a long conversation, much of which I didn't think he would understand. *It is true that I am partially a god, so let's just go with yes.*

"I god. You call me John." I replied simply.

The goblin's mouth dropped open. He seemed to be in a panic. He quickly got to his knees and bowed his head to the floor.

Leera looked at me with more shock than the goblin had. Lina had a beaming smile and muttered something about bringing a god's child into the world.

I clarified to the two of them in English that I was only partially a god and we would talk about who and what I was later.

With some effort I raised the goblin youth up. He wouldn't meet my gaze. *What to do here? Okay, why not give him a parting gift and send him on his way? But what, the rest of the skinned gopher? No, that's a shitty gift. I just told him I'm a god that wouldn't seem like a gift from a god. I need something that only I can do, something fun and somewhat flashy.*

"You's hold arm up, like this." I said as I raised my arm straight.

The goblin raised his arm.

"Okay, Leera, he's going to need some of your fog for this as it seems like it might be painful for him."

Leera moved over beside the goblin and started producing fog. I got up and grabbed a bone from Ye Olde Bone Pile and sat back down by the goblin's outstretched arm.

Let's just make this a quick and nasty version. I shaped it into a spike and minimally reinforced the tip. I pulled and stretched ligaments from the gopher body and went to work giving him his very own bone spike. Whenever his face would contort in pain, Leera would breath more fog and he would relax.

I made him the version like Lina's that always had the tip sticking out, so he wouldn't bleed every time he used it.

I sat back and looked at my work. You could clearly see it sticking up on the thin goblin arm, but it more or less looked natural.

The goblin held his arm up and looked at it. I raised mine and shot my spike. Lina followed suit, then even Leera got in the spirit by doing the same thing. The goblin, going with the flow, flexed his arm and his spike popped out. He looked like a kid on Christmas.

He started to chuckle and we followed suit, shooting our spikes and retracting them. Bob had been the first person to let me know how fun this was.

"You need go home now." I said bringing an end to our fun.

The goblin had a slightly sad look until he looked back down at his arm again, his eyes sparkling.

"I go now. Need go home before too dark. Danger in dark. I tell others of God John. You's gobs god now." He bowed once more before walking over to his stone knife and picking it up.

I walked him to the entrance. It was starting to get dark out. I told him to be careful, and he was gone into the

bushes in the blink of an eye.

Wait, did he say I was his god? Oh no, I'm not sure I want that. Oh, well, it might be fun to have worshipers, I suppose. That is as long as they don't offer me any pies.

I walked back towards Leera and Lina while pulling my pants off. The conversation that we just had with the young goblin was heavy, and I could see it affected both of them.

I was sure that the long story about myself and what I was would be equally sad and full of questions, so for now I decided it was better to take everyone's mind off of it all for a while.

We mated until it was late into the night. I made sure to spend an equal amount of time on both of my little ladies, ensuring that they were thoroughly satisfied.

Lina slept on my chest while Leera lay to my side with her leg over my waist. Pervy Guy rested, spent, in the crook of her knee.

From what our goblin guest said about it being dangerous outside after dark, I decided it was best to go get the small monstrous bear before something made a meal out of it. It also seemed like a good opportunity to perhaps find some additional predators and get some better parts.

I slowly moved Leera's leg down and off me. Pervy Guy reacted to the smooth skin as it slid down it. Leera murmured something quietly in her sleep but didn't stir. I moved Leera's arm off me, softly rolling her onto her back as I carefully took my arm from under her head.

Now for Lina. I slid her over, trying not to move her wing at an unnatural angle, and placed her on Leera's abdomen. Lina groaned in protest but seemed to settle back down after moving up and snuggling her face between Leera's breasts. Leera naturally moved her arms down to hold Lina, and they both drifted back to sleep.

I looked down at the two of them. I felt a warm feeling wash over me. I had to fight the urge to lay back down and cuddle the hell out of them. *When I get back I'm going to*

take my time and dote on each of them, spoiling them as much as possible.

I put my pants back on and this time I made sure to remember my weapon. I felt its weight once more in my hands as I slung it onto my back and fastened the bone snaps to hold it in place.

I exited the cave and the familiar urge to go northeast returned, however now there was an additional feeling coming from the goblin camp. Huh, this was strange. The one from the goblin camp wasn't pulling me. It was just announcing that it was there.

"Mors, do you know what this compulsion to go northeast is?" I mentally asked.

"No, Master, I'm afraid I can't feel anything," she replied, sounding disappointed.

"It's okay, Mors, I still love ya."

She smiled and disappeared.

After I get the small bear back here I might just have to go and investigate it. But I think it would be safer to take Bob along with me. If I've learned anything since I've been here, it's that this place is unforgiving to those who take it lightly.

I debated activating Life Sense. Although it would show me lifeforms that were around me, it would also make my eyes glow. Glowing eyes aren't that bad in the daylight, but at night they would be a beacon giving away my position.

Let's test out the wendigo's sense of smell. I inhaled deeply. I could smell dead things clearly for miles around. Might I add that the cave had a particularly strong smell. Huh, I guess that since I had been in there for so long I had kind of gotten used to it. I hoped it was the same for Leera and Lina as well. We all had the same ghoulish-wendigo stomach now, so to be honest it smelled a little appetizing.

I continued inhaling. I could smell several small dead things in the area, but the next largest source was coming from the same direction that I was compelled to go in. I also

got a bit from the direction of the goblin village, but it didn't smell as good.

A thought occurred to me: Was this what drew the wendigo here, and was this what kept animals from entering my cave? Also, why were goblin corpses not as appealing? Was that what kept them alive out here, just tasting bad? Wow, that was the worst survival trait I could think of. It was just sad; I felt bad for the goblins now.

Leera smelled okay, and I had tasted her several times now, and she was mainly made from goblins. I remembered back to Blend and how it makes my creations genetically viable throughout to allow for the addition of otherwise incompatible organs and limbs. I guessed with all the parts and modifications I had made when creating and recreating her body, she now was something entirely different from a goblin on a genetic level. She was closer to whatever I was when I was in living form.

I guess that means that as I upgrade myself I won't be able to slack on upgrading them, as well, if I still want them to get pregnant.

Oh, crap. I just realized that Pervy Guy's satyr heritage will continue in my children. My sons are going to be stuck in a perpetual puberty for their entire lives, and what about my daughters? Given the appetites of their mothers, they too will try to breed as soon as they are able to.

I felt a cold sweat spreading across my forehead as I pondered the difficulties I would be facing as a father.

I had been thinking while I was traveling and was almost to the small bear's corpse now. *Do I risk using Life Sense to check for threats around it?*

I decided to risk it. If it was only for a few seconds it would probably be okay.

My eyes lit up, and everything took on a yellow color. I saw a large red blob beside the spot where I had marked the bear earlier. It seemed to move as if it had noticed me and was gone in a flash.

I immediately cut off Life Sense and dove for the bushes.

I sat there for several moments just trying to use my ears to detect any noises or movement, no matter how small. All I heard was the rushing of water coming from the stream.

Several minutes passed and I decided it was time to check again. I moved carefully out of the bush and walked closer to the small bear corpse. As I walked I couldn't quite shake the feeling that something was watching me.

I hid behind the same tree that I had used earlier to observe the bears. I looked out and saw that the corpse had been partially eaten. Its entrails were spread out before it, and one of its legs was missing.

I crept toward it slowly. It really did smell good. I thought I might have a few bites of it myself, as other than eating a good portion of the parts pile that first day I hadn't eaten much. A lot of my time was spent Fleshcrafting and soul-sorting, which I would do in undead mode so my consumption was small. Other than when the large bear had hurt me earlier today and when I had recovered from the frostbite caused by the wendigo attack, I had not digested much of anything.

I still had the feeling that something was around. I quietly stood and looked around me, but I saw nothing.

My feet made noises as I walked along the pebbles of the bank. I stopped to listen. I heard pebbles continue shuffling even though I was no longer moving. I quickly craned my head around to where the noise had come from, but there was nothing that caught my attention.

I continued walking to the bear corpse and knelt down beside it. I reached down to a large patch of exposed muscle and ripped it off. I took a bite and chewed it slowly while trying to be aware of my surroundings.

I felt hot breath on the back of my neck. I went to turn but something sharp sunk deeply into my shoulder. I felt my body being slung around like a rag doll before I was tossed into the air. I smashed through several smaller trees before

slamming into a large one sideways. I felt my bones crack as my head jerked back and my neck broke from the impact. I lay there in shock. I was in undead mode again already, but it still hurt, especially my shoulder. I reached out to it, but it was gone. My entire arm was gone!

I sat up. My head flopped to the side. I focused my Fleshcrafting to mend my back and ribs as my eyes feverishly scanned my surroundings. Almost all the bones in my upper body had cracked or snapped. The arm I had left had shattered at the wrist, and even my bone spike seemed to have broken.

My bones were condensed to a hardness that was superhuman, and something had been able to throw me with enough force to shatter them all. My back itself would probably have been worse if it wasn't for my weapon taking some of the impact.

I propped up my head with my arm, and I finally saw it. It was huge. A mass of pure shadow. All I could make out were eyes that reflected the moonlight and massive white teeth snarling at me. It growled a low growl that raised the hairs on the back of my neck, and before I could react, it tore into me in a blur of teeth and fur.

I felt its fangs sink into my neck as my body jostled around.

Everything went dark and silent as I once again flew through the air. I landed in a heap, the rest of my arm shattered from the fall. In less than a second I felt something continue to chew on my neck, ripping out chunks of flesh and muscle. I feebly reached my shattered arm up to try to push it away only to feel something that caused me to freeze in shock. My head was missing! My fucking head!

It stopped its frenzy for a moment to rip off my hand before continuing to work at my neck.

What could I do here? I activated the calming effect; I desperately needed it as the beast kept tearing at me. I thought about what I had available. The only thing that

came to mind was the fog. I didn't have anything to infuse it with other than Weakness, which wouldn't do much to this thing.

I went back to the wendigo's soul and learned Curse of Sleep. I had been saving that for Bob, but this was an emergency.

I focused and began feebly leaking a constant stream of fog infused with the sleep effect as the creature moved on to eating my upper chest cavity, getting ever closer to my core.

I felt its movements lose their sharpness bit by bit, then I felt a weight press down on top of me.

I reached my arm stump up, protruding the still unbroken tip of my bone spike. I made a small hole in its flesh and melded my stump to it.

I focused my Fleshcrafting on stopping its heart as I continued to produce fog to keep it sleeping.

I felt it let out one last hard breath, and it was dead.

I focused all my energy on mending my bones until the ones that remained were whole again.

I then focused on severing its head from its body. I couldn't do much if I couldn't see or hear anything.

I awkwardly maneuvered its head to my neck and melded it together. *I guess this will have to do for now.*

I opened my eyes. The world was almost entirely black and white, but I could smell and hear everything in such sharp detail. I looked up at the moon, and the light was almost unbearable. I sat up, rolling the massive body off of myself, and found my hand only a few feet away. I positioned my stump and reattached it.

I felt up to my face. It was terrifying. I had a massive muzzle jutting out at least a foot and a half with teeth so large they threatened to bite through my lip. The mouth was covered with my blood and its drool.

I got up and searched for my other arm. I was quite a distance away from the bear corpse I had marked earlier. I

walked toward it again and found my arm lying beside it. I picked it up and reattached it, melding and Blending it.

I went to find my head; god only knew where that went. I smelled around. I could smell several traces of fresh blood, but only one smelled similar to the rest of my body. I walked toward it.

There it was, bald and beautiful. It had a confused expression plastered on it. It's not everyday you get to see your own severed head. Was this really my last expression back there? A look of *huh!*? I had a disturbing thought. Did living me have a soul that may be separate from my own? I used Soul Steal, but luckily nothing showed there. I sighed with some relief and canceled Soul Steal. I sat down by my head and placed it in my lap.

I focused my Fleshcrafting on removing this head, whatever it was. I set it to the side, then I placed mine back on, melding it into place and Blending the skin.

I opened my eyes again. everything was now in normal colors. I missed my exceptional hearing, but it was still good to be me again.

I grabbed the massive head by the fur and walked back to the small bear corpse. I used it to restore all my flesh that had been eaten by the massive creature. I also ate quite a bit of it, as now I was truly hungry.

I dragged the small bear's remains back to the creature's. I placed the head back on its body. It looked similar to a wolf but had huge bulky muscles in the front, and it was even bigger than the small bear. Its shadow coating was no longer in place, and I could see it was mostly grey and black in color. It was as if you took the size and muscle of a massive bull and combined it with a wolf, then slapped on a large head that was roughly a fifth of its body length while adding the teeth of a prehistoric creature.

What should I call this thing? A night wolf. No, that's a fighting game character and an offensive stereotype. Shadow wolf? Nope, that's the name of something else. Is

this perhaps a warg? Is it a shadow warg, a shadwarg? No, that's stupid, who would name it something like that?

"Mors, do you know what this thing is?"

"Yes, Master, according to orc shaman knowledge, that is a Sha'Dwarg."

I face palmed.

Did they think the gap in the pronunciation made it better or something? I wondered now if orcs were as bad at naming things as I was.

"Any other interesting information about it, Mors?" I asked.

"They have some degree of magic, but their speed and bite are their primary weapons. Orcs actually ride a smaller, domesticated variant of these for scouting or in battle. The domesticated ones they have no longer have any magical abilities, however, and are simply called wargs."

Well, it certainly was big enough to ride. I still couldn't get over just how easily it ripped me to shreds, though. It gave me a great idea: I could definitely use a mount at some point. Too bad I had no idea what soul I could use here to make it obedient enough. I didn't really want to use a sentient soul, either, as that would be too weird.

"Thank you, Mors."

I used Soul Steal.

I took the creature's soul into me.

Skills:

Stalk: *The Sha'Dwarg is an excellent hunter and has mastered the art of remaining unnoticed when following its prey.*

Sit: *When a Sha'Dwarg is young, its parents often teach it this ability to help in the distribution of food. If offered a treat, the Sha'Dwarg may sit and wait patiently to receive it.*

So, if I had held some meat up in the air this thing might not have attacked me? You've got to kidding me here. No wonder the orcs were able to domesticate them.

Well I'll definitely take Stalk; it seems better than Hide, at least.

*You have learned skill **Stalk**.*

Let's check magic.

Magic:

Dark Shroud: *You cloak yourself in darkness, making you almost undetectable at night. This skill does not work in daylight.*

Mana cost: 1 per minute as long as the spell is maintained. Additional mana may be used in lighter conditions. When in pure or near darkness, this spell has no mana cost.

Yep, definitely taking that, too.

*You have learned **Dark shroud**.*

I closed the soul screen and melded my finger to its body.

"Mors, make a notable parts list please."

Notable Parts:

Sense of Smell: *The Sha'Dwarg has an exceptional sense of smell.*

Sense of Hearing: *The Sha'Dwarg has an amazing sense of hearing.*

Sha'Dwarg Heart: *Minor mana regeneration.*

I closed the notable parts list.

I went about altering my sense of smell and my hearing to match the Sha'Dwarg. I restarted my heart and inhaled.

The sounds of the night came alive again, and I could smell the rich, earthy scents of the forest once more.

Well, dragging this and the small bear would be difficult. I fused the two bodies together to make them easier to drag and began my trek back to the cave moving slowly foot by foot.

Chapter 21: Others — John

I used my new senses to avoid any strange smells or unknown noises, which led me to walk in strange patterns. I could tell the trip back was going to be a long one.

After traveling a while, I decided to take a break near an unusually large tree to again gauge my surroundings for danger. *I wonder if this is a redwood? It's massive.* As I had opted to take the direct path here and back earlier, I hadn't noticed it.

I sat next to the two bodies and looked up at it, trying to estimate its height. As my eyes traveled back down I saw a strange sight. From the bark of the tree, a body started to form. It was tall, maybe only a few inches shorter than me. As it took shape, I noticed it was female.

Finally the body emerged from the tree and before me stood a very well-endowed green woman. Her head sprouted long, hairlike leaves and vines, and her skin smoothed out as she smiled invitingly at me.

I sat there slack-jawed as I stared at the absurdity of this spectacle.

She raised her arms and began to sing.

It was the most beautiful song I had ever heard. I felt like I was experiencing the full spectrum of the life cycle all at once. I was transfixed by this beauty and had a tremendous urge to embrace her.

Wait a minute here. This is a damn dryad, isn't it, and this is an obvious attempt to lure me in. Pervy Guy seems to be lured, but I'm not. Though when I look at her just right...

My mind started wandering as I stood up. The dryad licked her lips as I approached.

Nope! I'm not letting this happen. I stopped my heart and went undead. The song lost its charm and her face turned to

one of annoyance as she lowered her arms and glared at me.

"Tsch, oh, it's one of you things," she said as she gave me the shooing gesture with her hands as if trying to scare off a small animal. The language she spoke in was almost melodic sounding; I guessed this was forestkin.

"It's not nice to attempt to eat people, you know." I replied in fluent forestkin while taking another step towards her.

Her face changed into a look of surprise, as if she didn't expect me to talk. She seemed to regain herself, however, and continued to glare at me like I was something gross she had stepped in.

All right, let's see how she likes this. I restarted my heart.

Her eyes lit up and she smiled widely at me.

I stopped my heart.

She curled her lips in revulsion.

I started my heart again.

Her smile returned as if it had always been there while she licked her lips as if trying to entice me.

I had heard different versions of the dryad story. One was that they were the peaceful and gentle spirits of trees that wanted nothing more than to make the forest flourish. The other story I knew of said they would lure men to them so that they could drain their life essence to sustain their own and grow their personal trees. This one seemed to be behaving like the latter.

I was curious, however. I wanted to see if Fleshcrafting would work on her, or was she more tree than person? She looked soft enough.

I got closer as she held her arms out invitingly. I wrapped her in an embrace. Sure enough, vines immediately shot out of her, piercing my skin and traveling through my veins.

Before the draining could start I stopped my heart.

She started struggling to get away. I picked her up; she was heavy. I dragged her away from the tree as she

screamed at the top of her lungs. Her hard arms hit me, and it was like being hit by a thick branch. After that didn't work, her fingers tore at me and her legs flailed in her desperate attempt to get away.

As I carried her away from the tree she gradually stiffened and hardened in my arms until the struggling stopped. I looked at her, now a solid object. I ripped the vines from my skin and attempted to Fleshcraft her.

Nope, she was indeed just a tree. I took my weapon from my back and struck her in the neck. It connected with a dull thud. I began sawing until her head came off.

I then brought it closer to the tree. Its mouth opened in complete horror. It seemed to be trying to speak, but no words came out.

I guess this thing is technically unkillable. Maybe fire would work, but I didn't have any of that. I activated Soul Steal. I saw nothing. Well, this is a bust. I dropped her head.

I grabbed her body and returned it to the tree. I did the same with her head, and both parts melted back into the giant redwood.

A few minutes passed and she reformed.

"Damn you!"

She screamed at me while stomping her foot with as much force as she could muster. "Damn you to the abyss, you foul monstrosity! How dare you do something like that to one as perfect as me!" She continued berating and threatening me for several minutes until she ran out of steam and stood there once more, her arms crossed. She looked at me just seething in rage and disgust.

"You did try to eat me, I believe." I said calmly.

"Of course I did! But at least I would have had the decency to make sure you enjoyed it! What you did to me was something else entirely! Never have I been treated this badly. You sawed off my head!" She was grinding her teeth now, just looking me up and down. "The whole time you did

it don't think I didn't notice your little friend there poking at me. You're sick! You make me sick!"

She finally stopped talking, but her eyes remained glued to a certain spot between my legs.

Pervy Guy twitched in acknowledgment of the attention he was getting. *No, I will not be pulling splinters from there. I don't care how hot she looks — I have zero desire to screw a tree.*

"Okay then, it was nice to meet you and all, but you can't eat me, and I can't steal your soul, so I think we're done here."

She seemed to shake herself out of her trance. "What, you're just going to do all that and leave?"

"Yep." I replied before walking over to the fused corpses.

As I dragged the bear and Sha'Dwarg away, she continued to hurl obscenities that I didn't know this world had in my direction until just before I got out of eyesight. She then screamed something unexpected: "Come back to chat every now and then; it does get boring out here, after all."

If she wasn't entirely green I would have sworn she was a redhead. I marked her tree on my map; I might need to talk to her again at some point.

My newly acquired sense of hearing and smell allowed me to navigate my way back to the cave in relative safety. I had to take a detour once or twice to avoid an unfamiliar smell, but by the time I could see the clearing, the sky was already starting to brighten.

I inhaled again. *Yep, that's the smell of death. Home sweet ho... Wait, what's that?* I took several more deep breaths. I smelled something different. It smelled of dust and leather. There was also something familiar about it. A hint of rot?

I used Life Sense and saw two blobs making their way through the trees across from the clearing. I released the corpses.

I activated the Dark Shroud spell that I had gotten from the Sha'Dwarg and watched my vast manapool decrease slightly. With my current mana regen, this wasn't a problem — even if it depleted halfway, I would be fine in a week or after a big meal.

I stalked my prey, careful of my steps and avoiding anything that may be noisy. I deactivated Life Sense.

I could see them now. One was wearing a red cloak and matching crimson robes. The other was a masked figure with robes similar to Dipshit's. *I'll call them Red Guy and Masked Man.*

I stalked closer to them and stopped when I was about ten feet behind. The one in red seemed to be winded and was resting on his staff. The other one had their arms crossed and seemed to be looking around impatiently.

I drew my weapon and squatted down.

"Damn that wretch Harolf for making us chase him all the way to the mountains!" Red Guy spat.

Masked Man responded, "I still can't believe an idiot like that was actually able to steal the book."

They were speaking Therossian.

"Well, if he was foolish enough to actually try to read it, I'm sure that it already sucked his soul out, and all we'll find here is a corpse holding a book." Red Guy responded between labored breaths.

"Just how the hell did he even join our order in the first place? Don't we have high requirements for intelligence and magical aptitude?" Masked Man said while stifling a yawn.

"It was all Eunice's idea. That man had been her tailor for years, and you know how she is about fashion. I was fine with my regular brown hemp and burlap, but no, now I'm the red guy just because I don't animate corpses anymore," Red Guy responded.

Was he a psychic? I worried for a second, but he didn't turn my way.

The masked figure spoke up. "You should get back into it, it can be a lot of fun. Every now and then the initiates will make zombies and flesh golems then fight them against each other to see who wins. They're always coming down to the parts room and buying different stuff from me to try out. I actually remember hearing a story about Harolf taking on a few of these fights."

"You know I'm too old to be interested in trends. In my day, a zombie was just for terrorizing your foes and maybe the occasional manual labor, not for some trashy blood sport. I mean, initiates these days just have no respect for the dark arts." Red Guy feebly held his fist in the air and looked like he was about to start rambling when Masked Man cleared his throat, interrupting him.

"I mean, Harolf actually picked a fight with one of the adepts. Can you imagine that? An aged tailor picking a fight with someone who was born, bred, and raised for necromancy. They say that when the adept won he had his flesh golem dry-hump Harolf for more than an hour while people just laughed. I mean, when the Masters were called, instead of breaking it up they just joined in festivities and sent some of the initiates to fetch wine. There was food served and it actually became a pretty fun party," Masked Man said, then laughed as if imagining it.

Yep, that sounded like Dipshit. That had to be who they were talking about. His real name was Harolf, huh? It kind of reminded me of a friend of mine from my world, Harold Faulkner. We would play a popular card fighting game from time to time, and he went by Haroldf.

"The Masters actually did that?" Red Guy said, absolutely flabbergasted.

"Ah, it's just a story, so it was probably exaggerated. My only question is how he actually managed to get the book. It's no easy task. Someone had to have been helping him."

Red Guy seemed to finally catch his breath and spoke. "At least he was foolish enough to brag about this cave he

used way up in the mountains and how perfect it is for private experiments." He began coughing again.

"Yeah, I heard he had plans to take his woman up here until that story got around and she dumped him."

"Who do you think told us where to find him?" Red Guy spoke between coughs.

My thoughts raced.

It looks like these guys are about ready to move. What should I do? If they get to my cave, they'll find Lina and Leera. Neither of them are helpless, but these guys are definitely magic users, and it's highly likely that the girls are still asleep.

I could try to talk to them, however they are both tied to necromancy and would probably just see me as a flesh golem and attack. Although, I don't really look like a cobbled together undead anymore, and I do have a pulse. I might just fool them.

I could go to the cave, grab the girls and flee, but they are too close now for that to work. I could also just ambush them here; surprise may give me an advantage. I'm more than certain that I could kill them both in one swing.

From the conversation they were having, I felt like these guys weren't that bad. They just sounded like coworkers around the water cooler. It didn't hurt my opinion of them that their subject of choice was Dipshit's stupidity.

I decided I would go with a combination strategy. I would come out to talk, then if they attacked I would run in the opposite direction to pull them away from the cave.

I canceled Dark Shroud.

I stood up and placed my weapon back on my back.

I yelled in Therossian, "Hey, is there anything I can help the two of you with?"

They both jumped at the sudden sound. The Red Guy clasped at his chest for a moment before they both turned slowly to face me. They stared at me with dumb expressions as if trying to figure me out.

The one in the red seemed to be appraising me. His eyes stopped on my harness and he spoke. "Where did you get that, um, fine garment you're wearing?"

"Off a guy I killed in that cave over there." I responded honestly.

His eyes went wide at my admission. Yeah, I probably should've known that murder was frowned upon here.

"Did... did..." His speech was interrupted by another coughing fit. *I wonder, do they know about allergies here?*

It finally looked as if he had finished as he took a long inhale, but then the coughing resumed as Masked Man and I just stared at him, waiting patiently.

"So, how are you doing?" I asked the masked guy while we waited.

"Not too bad, how about yourself?" he responded.

"You know, just killing Sha'Dwargs and pissing off dryads, normal stuff." I said.

He gave a hearty laugh unbefitting of his frightening appearance and nodded knowingly. I noticed a strange quality to his voice, something I couldn't identify.

Finally the guy in red seemed to calm down. He spoke. "Did he perchance have a book with him?"

I crossed my arms and nodded. This is probably where things get ugly. He looked feeble, but the two of them had made it through these woods and up this mountain just fine in the dark. They even had the confidence to stop to have casual conversations. They definitely weren't weak.

He locked eyes with me and spoke. "Do you have it?"

I debated lying and saying I sold it or that I never saw one, but I've always been an honest guy — well, mostly.

"Funny story about that. I kinda absorbed it, then pushed back out the remains later when I converted its god fragment into mana." I said as I gave an awkward, forced smile.

The old man went pale. He had an expression of utter disbelief, like when you tell a child that Santa isn't real. Not

that I had done that. Well, maybe once or twice, but they had deserved it.

The masked guy pinched the bridge of the nose on his mask and hung his head.

The man in red spoke again in a voice that sounded like he was fighting the urge to yell. "We now know that you know what it is, but to make up such a preposterous story like that..." He appeared to calm himself down a little before resuming. "Are you trying to provoke us?"

It was true, though. *How do I convince them?* I remembered what Mors had told me about Soul Steal complete.

I activated Soul Steal. Green flames shot from my eyes and a few random souls in the area flew into me.

The guy in red grabbed his chest again and fell to his knees. The guy in the mask moved over to him and knelt beside him; the whole time he never took his eyes off of mine.

I canceled Soul Steal.

The old guy pulsed with a green light before falling forward. The masked man took several hurried steps back as the red guy erupted in green flames.

His cloak and robes quickly burned off, followed by his skin, muscles, and organs. The green flame was sucked violently into his eye sockets and finally seemed to be satisfied as the remaining flames diminished, leaving only his skeleton. The guy in the mask took off his cloak and laid it on top of the skeleton as if covering the dead.

I started to ask him what the hell that was when the skeleton moved its arms, pushing itself up to its knees. Its bones were singed and the remaining tendons had fused to them in a strange way that held the bones together.

It spoke in an ethereal voice. "So, it finally happened, huh?"

"Yeah, it looks like you were successful. Congratulations." Masked Man replied flatly before helping the skeleton to its

feet.

"Wow, I feel a lot lighter on my feet now," the skeleton mused to no one in particular.

I let out a forced laugh.

"Just what the hell is going on here?" I asked.

The masked guy replied, "Oh, he's a Lich now. That was what his goal was. Basically he forged a soul prison inside himself as he died and bound his own soul to himself."

"Oh yeah, that." I replied in mock understanding.

"Still, I just don't know that I could go down that path. I mean, you lose the ability to enjoy food, drink, and, most importantly, ladies and lady zombies." Masked Man said as his eyes glazed over momentarily.

The skeleton stared up at the masked guy with its jaw open for a second before speaking.

"Your bizarre preferences aside, I gave up on most of that at least twenty years ago. I'm an academic. I will be fine with just my books."

It looked back over to me and brought its bony finger up to its chin. "So, I guess you may have been telling the truth after all. I have only read about that level of skill in books far older than any of the kingdoms today. How did you obtain it?"

"I'm a fellow selfbound undead, though I've gotten past that limitation as well." I replied.

"Ah, then you must have had a few millennia to master it," the Lich said while nodding as if it had reached its own conclusions. It moved its hands from its chin and continued. "That book, however, was one of our most sacred relics. It was only ever entrusted to the current heads of our order, and most of them were still not a fan of using it, what with the soul-eating and all."

"Do you know what god it was that inhabited or created it?" I asked.

The Lich laughed as it spoke. "Oh, no, there's no way to tell that. It's just always sort of been here." It stopped

chuckling and turned deadly serious. "I do know one thing about it, though. If we don't have the book, then we need to have at least something to show for it."

I turned on Life Sense, Soul Steal and Dark Shroud as I cast Weakness on them.

I drew my weapon slowly and exhaled fog as I spoke in the most sinister tone I could muster. "Are you two sure you can harm something that can absorb the Book of Souls?"

It was a strong bluff on my part, but I hoped they would take it.

The Lich's mouth dropped open as the masked man stepped to get in front of him, his eyes wild with panic. The Lich spoke hastily. "Of course we didn't mean you!" It started waving its hands in a placating gesture.

The masked man relaxed and stepped back to the side of the lich.

I think I won that power play. I deactivated everything once more.

The lich spoke again. "We mean Harolf's body — at the very least we need to show proof that he's dead, and barring that, we need his soul."

"I kind of absorbed that, too — well, absorbed some, used some for material, and I might have eaten some at one point. I also converted his soul to mana, so there may be an odd bit of him here and there, but nothing I can give you really." I replied.

I couldn't see an expression from either one of them for obvious reasons, but if I had to guess I would say they were wincing.

"I can give you one thing, however. Wait right there." I walked off to the corpses I had left in the bushes. I separated the small bear's remains and dragged it out to them.

The masked man looked at me quizzically.

"Masked Man, you may want to go grab a snack or something because we're going to be here for a while." I

said.

"It's Ralphus," he responded.

"What is?" I asked

"I am. I'm Ralphus," he said.

For some reason I feel like that name should belong to an old guy with his belly hanging out.

"Okay, Ralphus, I'm John." I replied.

Ralphus burst out in a laugh.

"You have such a strange name."

I stared at him blinking for a minute and decided to just move on.

"Alright, my fellow selfbound, I'm about to give you a treat." I said as I gestured for the Lich to come over to the bear corpse.

"You may call me Barzealis. May I ask what we're about to do here?" he said.

Damn people and their names here; why can't it be Steve or Josh?

"Sure, we're about to make you a body to go over that skeleton." I said with a reassuring smile.

The Lich's jawbone once again hung open before it replied, "We've tried flesh constructs before, and not only are they ugly, they all rot after a while."

"I assure you, mine are top-notch. Worst case scenario, you'll just have to shed the flesh suit and return to what you currently have." I replied.

It tapped the side of its skull with its finger for a while as if contemplating.

"I'll even let you pick how you want it. Any preferences?" I asked, trying to hurry this along. The girls would be missing me soon.

The Lich shook its head as if to start to say no, but then thought better of it. "Do you have any examples of your work?"

I wasn't about to let them ogle Leera and Lina. I pulled a fair sized chunk out of the meaty part on my arm. Then I

separated an equal amount of flesh from the bear and Fleshcrafted it to my arm. I then sealed and Blended it. I showed him my blemish-free arm.

He nodded approvingly.

"Okay, now that that's settled, any requests? I could even turn you into a woman if you wanted." I told him.

Ralphus seemed to be looking on with interest.

"Gods no, who would want that? No, just make me average build, nothing fancy, and give me black curly hair with an impressive beard." He lay down next to the small bear.

I began immediately. I melded him with the bear, stripping off the hair from the skin and grafting the muscles on top of his bones. I did a minimum amount of sculpting, just keeping him human. I gave him an average face and normal brown eyes. I evened everything out and melded my finger on to use Blend.

Yep, that's a normal guy. I might have embellished a bit here and there. Let's just say he might give dating another try now. I started the heart I gave him. It had moderate mana regen at around 5 per hour.

Mors sent me an alert.

Fleshcrafting Level 6:

All Fleshcrafting speed is increased.

You may now unlock the potential of a flesh construct's brain when Fleshcrafting to learn mental abilities.

Well, that was awesome. I wished I'd had that before I remade Lina and Leera, but I didn't exactly know how to make use of it yet.

I disconnected my finger and gestured for him to sit up.

He sat up and examined his hands, flexing them as he got used to everything. He felt his face and his nethers then smiled.

"Great job! I would call this an astonishing success. Quite speedy as well," he said, now speaking in a strange mix of

normal and ethereal voices.

He felt his chest for a moment before looking up at me as if afraid to believe what he was feeling. "My heart — I think it's actually beating. I never would have believed that this was possible."

"Yep, welcome to the start of your living-undead life." I said with a smile.

He rose to his feet, stepping around carefully as if feeling the ground for the first time. Ralphus once again placed the cloak around Barzealis.

Barzealis looked at me and smiled. He held out his hand and I shook it, being careful not to squeeze too hard.

"The book was indeed a one-of-a-kind rarity. However, there are several other god-artifacts and ancient tomes in the world. One thing is certain, though. In all my studies and in all the history of my order, there has never been a living undead before. The idea of it is simply too preposterous to ever work, but here I stand: the realized goal of necromancy. We may not have found the book, but we did find something that wasn't written in it." He broke off the hand shake and turned to walk away as if afraid I would change my mind and try to take his body back.

"I don't have the words to thank you enough for what you've done today. In a week's time I will send Ralphus back with whatever I can find for you from my personal items, along with some parts you may find useful." He started walking back through the trees in a mix of eagerness and disbelief, as if the world was new to him once more.

Ralphus approached me and whispered, "When I come back, I have a request for you. I also run the parts-supply depot, so maybe we can work something out." He handed me a fair sized piece of amber then ran after Barzealis.

Given what he had said about zombie girls earlier, I was frankly a little worried about what his request might be. I tucked the amber into my harness.

I looked up at the sky. It was now early morning. I had apparently worked on Barzealis all through sunrise.

I gathered the diminished remains of the small bear and dragged them to the Sha'Dwarg. I threw them on top and hauled it all back into the cave. Leera and Lina were sitting across from each other eating some of the bobcat and chatting happily with one another.

It looked like Lina had tried on her mostly uncured gopherkini. I felt kind of guilty about the quality of clothing she had to wear and made a mental promise to seek out better options in the future.

I used Stalk and stopped to listen.

I heard Leera mid-sentence. "Yeah, I know, but we need at least one, maybe two more — I couldn't move at all after we were done last night."

"Me either! There's just so much that comes out, too; it's like he has a never-ending supply." Lina responded while tenderly placing a hand on her stomach.

Leera's expression turned sad for a moment before she spoke. "Do you think he's avoiding telling us about his past?"

Lina responded, "I don't think so. He was probably just trying to make us happy after what happened. He probably thought we would be sad after we saw our son from before he remade us."

"It was strange, wasn't it? Knowing that you and I were once mates in a previous life?" Leera said, sounding contemplative.

"I have never told the boss, er, John, but I remember a little bit of it. Not anything solid, but the feelings stayed with me. They were sad. I felt so unhappy, insecure and incomplete. I think I lived that entire life in fear." Lina replied while looking downward.

"And I lived more than sixty years alone, while my other half was also unsatisfied... No offense." Leera tried to chuckle that last part away.

"None taken; I wasn't meant to be male. Only he saw that. Not only did he give me the body, but he made me feel desired. He made me his, all the way to my soul. I know I can never belong to anyone else no matter how many lifetimes I live through." Lina replied in a self-assured voice.

"I know what you mean. It was like all that time I spent was just in waiting for him. Then he just swoops in and gives us everything we always wanted. Even though we are mates, he doesn't just use us. He still makes me feel loved. Did you know I have teeth?" She pointed her finger between her legs before continuing. "Down there."

Lina looked at her with an inquisitive expression. "You have what? Down where?"

Leera leaned back and slowly spread her legs as Lina dropped her food and moved closer. Leera flexed her body and winced in pain, letting out a small yelp.

Lina jumped back in surprise while Leera relaxed and healed herself.

"I think it was his way of telling me that I have a choice, that I'm not just for mating. His way of showing absolute trust in me. I don't think he would ever hold anything back from us unless it was to protect us. But I sometimes worry he takes on too much alone." Leera said, still breathing heavily.

Lina ran her hands along her face and head. "I could have died yesterday."

They both began laughing.

I pondered what they were saying. Sometimes I forgot just how smart they were. It was true, I had been putting off telling them about who I was in my life before. I wanted them to keep their high opinion of me, not to think of me as some self-destructive loser. I knew I would have to have that conversation at some point, but I wanted to wait as long as I could.

I chose my moment, walked over, and sat down next to them. Lina sat in my lap and Leera took her usual spot at

my side. As I cuddled them both I realized just how badly things could have gone if I were even a little later in returning. They almost certainly would have ended up in a confrontation with the necromancers, and I could have lost them both permanently — body and soul.

Restoring Bob has just risen up my list of stuff to do. Then we need a new place. The cave has seen too many visitors over the past few days, and I couldn't feel safe leaving them here.

I summarized the events of the night and pointed out the Sha'Dwarg corpse. I felt no reason to give them all the gory details about just how close it had come to killing me.

They walked over to it and marveled. In many ways it was even more impressive than the wendigo. It wasn't as wide as it was long, but its shoulders filled two-thirds of the cave entrance.

"All right." I told them. "It's time to bring Bob back!"

Lina clapped her hands and Leera just smiled.

I decided to try and be thorough here.

I closed my eyes.

"Mors, bring up a list of transferable skills, abilities, and magic that I could give to Bob."

Skills:

Sit: When a Sha'Dwarg is young its parents often teach it this skill to help in the distribution of food. If offered a treat, the Sha'Dwarg may sit and wait patiently to receive it.

Parts and Abilities:

Hybrid Eyes: Your eyes grant the abilities of Life Sense, Night Sight and Coerce Lesser Lifeform.

Hybrid Nose: Your nose has a profound sense of smell. It is extra-sensitive to the smell of death.

Lungs of the Wendigo: Enables continuous breathing, mana infusion, and fog generation.

Heart of Mana Regeneration: You will now regenerate mana at a rate proportional to your heart

size per hour.

Hybrid Stomach: *Your stomach is automatically used as storage to passively heal any injuries. It can also convert what it contains, including soul fragments, into mana, thereby creating a waste-free system.*

Mana Gathering:

Your hair passively gathers mana from the world around you.

Loins of a Satyr: *Grants ability Perversion.*

Magic: N/A

Damn, I don't have any spells to give Bob.

"Mors, I know I can copy languages. Is there a reason why I can't copy spells?" I asked.

"Languages are an algorithm. All that is needed is a conversion of intentions from the native language to the intended language. If something does not have a language of its own, it cannot be taught. Spells are also an algorithm, but there is another aspect to them, which is soul affinity. Without extensive practice or an inborn talent, the soul cannot be taught. When transferring from a soul, all relevant parts are transferred. However, an error occurs when attempting to copy a spell, as it has nothing to anchor it to the soul without practical knowledge."

"Doesn't Bob have the dark affinity? I learned some of my spells from his soul, didn't I?" I asked.

"Yes, he does, but his chances of relearning it are not high without tutelage."

"If we try, what will happen?" I asked.

"There stands a high chance that he will lose his affinity and that you will lose the spell. It would be better to try to reattach him rather than trying to copy over a spell."

"Why are the chances so low? More details, please, I'm not quite understanding."

"When attempting to copy magic, I must reestablish the bonds between the spell and the soul, meaning that I would have to split the bonds between you and him. That weakens

your bonds to the spell while trying to create the bonds for him. The spell must then be split in half and the remaining parts recreated using souls. During that time it may be rejected as incomplete before the new parts are created, leaving you without a spell and him with a damaged bond to that magic type. It gets easier if they have already established their own bonds to a spell, as it takes less time to adhere and the chance of rejection is lower."

That was a lot to take in.

"What about fully transferring a spell from me to him rather than copying?" I asked.

"You may do that, but transferring from yourself can still be riskier than simply transferring from another soul. It's like trying to perform your own root canal. I don't advise it, but it can be done. Basically, you may forget parts of the spell during transfer and impart an incomplete spell, which is then subject to rejection."

Huh, I guess it's like walking to the fridge, opening the door, and then forgetting what you went there for.

"Thank you for the explanation, Mors. You did great!" I said.

I figured she could use a compliment after all that. She always fulfills all my requests to a T.

Mors beamed at me. "Did you have anything else, Master?"

"Sure do, bring up a complete list of what Bob currently has." I replied.

Skills:

Stalking

Hunting level 2

Hide

Fishing

Foraging

Perversion

Woah, wait a minute, why does Bob have perversion as a skill? I thought that was an ability?

"Mors, any Ideas as to how perversion is one of Bob's skills?" I asked Mors.

She appeared and began explaining while looking uncomfortable. "Skills are learned. Bob must have done some questionable things fairly frequently to have gained it as a skill."

I know he never touched Lina... Oh god, the rodents. This is why you shouldn't go snooping around someone's soul, I suppose. Aw, he and Lina ate them afterwards. Until this point I hadn't thought it was possible to mentally dry-heave.

"Mors, lets see the rest, including his affinities." I commanded.

Soul Affinities:

Dark: Complete

Primal: Innate

Infernal: Innate

Magic: Undetermined

Wow, his dark affinity is at complete; Bob must have been one bad dude. Odd, Bob seems to have some magic, or at least the start of some. I wonder what this will become — with his personality there's no telling. He has two Innates; I need more clarification.

"Mors, why does he have innate affinities, and what does that mean?" I asked.

"These are magics that are still tied to his soul, however he hasn't met the criteria for their activations yet. Primal is ancient and naturally occurring, like the wendigo. It doesn't require gestures or chants to activate. Infernal is linked to the infernal plane; you would consider it demonic. It often involves self scarification and long summoning rituals that include sacrifices and sex."

The more I find out about Bob, the more I worry about him, and I'm about to make him a body that is basically a killing machine. So far he hasn't been anything but loyal to me. Even after I first spoke to him, he told me to convert

him to mana. If nothing else can be said for him, it is that he is not selfish. I trust the crazy bastard and I don't know why, it's only a feeling on my part, but I think that Bob would have my back even if it cost him everything. I will do all that I can to foster his growth and make him stronger and happier.

I brought up Bob's soul and selected talk.

Bob's small, winged figure showed up before me, glowing a spectral green.

"Hey, Bob!" I said.

Despite everything I had found out about him, I really missed him.

"Hey there, Boss!" he said as he smiled his sharp-toothed grin.

"All right, I've got one wendigo, one and a quarter monstrous bears, and one Sha'Dwarg corpse waiting for you, any preferences?" I asked.

"I've had some time to think on it and..." Bob stared at Mors for a moment before continuing. "That fairy you made really gets to me." Bob's spectral crotch seemed to grow.

"Damnit Bob, this isn't the time or place for that. I have no idea how I would even clean spectral jizz from my mind." I said in a serious tone.

"Okay, okay, Boss. I've thought about it, and I've decided. I want two penises and one vagina," he said while sucking on a finger and thrusting his butt out at me in a girly pose.

Leave it to Bob to render me speechless.

"You son of a bitch, I'm being serious here. What do you want?" I asked.

"I trust your creativity, Boss. I just want to rend your enemies and rape their corpses while their families watch," he said while his eyes glazed over as if imagining it. He spoke again while exhaling slowly. "Yeah, that would be hot."

Have I neglected Bob? Has his dementia grown in this solitude, or am I just seeing more of my friend than I want

to?

"The wendigo has killed me once, and the Sha'Dwarg basically handed me my ass. You'll be able to kill pretty much whoever you want to, and I'll even give you alone time with the corpses if you need it." I said while looking at him knowingly.

"Aww, Boss, I just might fall for you yet," he said, striking another entirely inappropriate pose. I'd now seen more than I cared to of Bob's private parts.

Now that I had seen what was in Bob's soul, I realized he was like your creepy uncle's creepy uncle. He had an overbearing honesty that was like the voice we suppress in the backs of our minds. He was Bob, unapologetically so. I briefly thought about making Bob's new body a giant honey badger.

"All right, Bob, I won't judge you. I'll make sure you like what I create for you." I said with a hint of concern in my voice.

Bob nodded.

I worried that he might end up traumatizing everyone. I definitely should have checked in with him every now and then. He seems overly cognitive of the passage of time in soul form. I wondered if that was a side effect of his leftover memories from being a torch or just his normal personality.

"I'll see you on the other side, Bob." I said.

Bob did an uncharacteristically refined bow as if he were a proper gentleman.

I opened my eyes.

In my peripheral vision Leera was holding Lina in her lap and stroking her hair softly as they watched me.

I had to drag the parts outside the cave, as I was sure he would get too big to get out comfortably by the time I was done.

I initiated Fleshcrafting.

I used the wendigo as a core. I added the rear legs of the monstrous bear. I shaped the back paws into hooves like a

mountain goat would have. I Blended in the Sha'Dwarg, giving it the overall shape of a giant wolf. I shaped the horns into something more usable, curving them back to protect the sides of his skull and placing the point forward, still enabling him to gore enemies.

I placed six openings on his chest and connected them to the lungs. I knew it would be inconvenient if they were open at all times, so I gave them skin and muscle allowing Bob to open and close them as he pleased. He now had both the lungs from the wendigo and the Sha'Dwarg. He should be able to produce an astonishing amount of fog.

I added the mouth and nose of the Sha'Dwarg over the face of the wendigo and Blended both heads together, giving him a slightly shorter muzzle. To compensate for that, I lengthened the teeth and added an additional row.

I converted the front paws into more of a hand shape, giving each finger full flexibility while keeping the pads to cushion impact. I added a thumb and made certain that it did not get in the way when he ran. He would never type above ten words per minute now, but in this world he wouldn't have to.

Bob's chest was huge after merging the wendigo and Sha'Dwarg, so I was able to make him a large heart with a huge amount of mana regen. I went to work layering on the additional muscle of the monstrous bear. I reinforced the tendons in his hind legs and made them as strong as I could.

I added Bob's requested parts. Before I examined his soul, I would have thought he was kidding, but now I wasn't so sure. You would have to be pretty messed up to gain perversion as a skill. Just what Bob was going to use these on I had no clue. *Oh, gross; I just realized why he wanted one of each. But why the extra one?*

I decided to stop thinking about that... Actually that's not a bad idea. I took some time to fleshcraft myself, making Pervy Guy a twin right above the original. I would surprise Leera and Lina later with this addition.

I slapped my face. *Okay, time to finish up Bob.*

I gave Bob the long fur of the Sha'Dwarg, making it all black. I gave it the mana-gathering capabilities of the paradise falcon. I decided to give him a grey streak from the top of his head down to his tail as a nod to the honey badger which I was now convinced was his spirit animal, though I didn't make it as wide as what a honey badger has because I still wanted Bob to look menacing.

I attached my finger and added all abilities and hybrid parts. I made Bob's eyes a deep crimson. I made his horns black. I used Blend to finalize everything. *Huh? I got an ability. Oh yeah, I forgot that I recently leveled up Fleshcrafting.*

Let's see what this ability is.

Increased Perception of Time (IPT): *When the Sha'Dwarg attacks or runs, its brain perceives time differently, allowing it to make fluid and complicated movements at lightning speed.*

Yep, I definitely need that. So far my best attack strategy had been playing dead. I Fleshcrafted myself to add that ability before I detached my finger.

I took a step back to look at my work.

Bob's body was huge. He would be taller than me when standing on all fours, and twice my height when standing on his hind legs, though I don't think he could do that for long. His weight if I had to guess would put him at over two tons. I had layered the muscle on thickly, making him appear like a crossbreed of an American bulldog and a hellish wolf. This look should definitely compliment his infernal affinity.

I stopped Fleshcrafting.

I opened the soul screen.

I gave Bob the sit skill. I laughed to myself, but it may serve a practical purpose as well. Bob might need to be controlled a little at some point.

I dragged Bob's soul onto his new body and waited to see my friend again.

Chapter 22: As Planned — Thads

I sat in the leader's tent — my tent now — laughing to myself. That old fool may have been a general with a vast knowledge of military strategy, but he knew nothing of subterfuge and politics.

I was one of the Duke's inner circle; did he think I didn't know how to make a few conspirators disappear?

Lenny was my inside man. In fact, he had been so from the first girl. He was a virgin before coming here; did Bartas really think Lenny would give up an endless stream of new girls? He had also shown himself to be a sadistic bastard. Most of the resurrections I had to do were because of him. Once we were without a girl for a few days as he had literally torn off her head bare-handed. By the time I had found out she had been dead for a few hours, there was nothing I could do. Lenny just walked back into the tent as I left to do goddess knows what.

I got up and walked out. This place was really starting to stink now. After we dumped all the bodies in the latrine, it had actually overflowed.

If ever there was a time to move camps it was now.

I waved over Lenny and a few of my trusted people. We walked back into the tent and over to a table with a map.

We began discussing places we could go. We had been here for a while now and had camped in most of the natural expanses within the area. Obviously we couldn't go back to those. They would have the same issues, and a new host of beasts would be in the area now since we basically left them food and departed — not to mention the stench would still be there, and if a new latrine must be dug, it shouldn't be near an old one.

A few of the goblins had been able to speak some Therossian. Mostly they just said “no” and “it hurts,” but

one had asked us not to kill his young gobs, as he called them. We used that to find out where their village was.

At the very least, it should be a clearing, and as a bonus they might have food or usable structures already in place. Maybe even a few human captives that we could play with.

I brought up the idea. Everyone seemed to be in support of it. I really did love the way they screamed. They were different from humans there, as they never held back their reactions. They expressed pain and fear to their full extent. Not one goblin had ever tried to act brave.

"All right, it's decided. Have the men pack up all the tents and get them ready for departure. Tomorrow, we slaughter goblins." I commanded as we all smiled at each other.

This would be fun.

Chapter 23: Bob's Back — John

Bob opened his big red eyes and sat back on his haunches, his tail wagging.

"Bob!"

"Boss!"

Bob hugged me, his massive body having no trouble dragging me over to him. I briefly hugged him back then pushed away.

"Things are kinda reversed now, huh?" Bob said, somehow still maintaining his same old voice, albeit a little deeper.

"Yeah, now you're the big one." I replied with a smile on my face.

Bob examined his new body before stopping at the obvious spot.

"Wow! I didn't think you'd actually do it. I guess now I really can go screw myself." He laughed as he spoke.

Bob's eyes gradually drifted over to Lina and Leera.

"Lina? Is that you? I can see he really did some improving on you, as well," he said while looking her up and down.

Lina jumped up out of Leera's lap and flew over to greet Bob.

"Ah, you can just take off now, too, that's cool." Bob said, his eyes still glued on her small figure.

Lina hugged Bob's forearm before hopping back to be at my side.

"I finally did it! I'm the boss's mate!" she said as she began to flush red. "I can even have his babies!"

She looked up at me and smiled shyly before continuing. "I think I may already have one on the way."

Bob's eyes went wide as he spoke. "Damn, Boss, you move quickly! And I was wondering how you fit all that in Leera before — now I can't even imagine."

Lina fiddled with her fingers as if not sure what to do with her hands and then replied.

"It doesn't... Well, not all of it." She looked a little ashamed.

I picked her up and held her in my arms as she looked into my eyes, obviously thinking about what she had said.

"Damnit, Bob, what did you make me say!" she yelled out uncharacteristically.

I heard Leera chuckle behind me as she approached. She had her long hair draping over her breasts. The black of her hair stood out in contrast to her almost white skin. She had a hand covering her lower parts.

Although she wasn't shy like Lina, I think she still felt self-conscious when another male was around. I would need to make her something to wear soon.

Bob's anatomy responded as he tried to look away, likely for my benefit.

"Leera, I love what you've done with your hair! You really must tell me your secret." Bob said with a smile.

"Welcome back, Bob! He's really missed you, you know," she said while nodding in my direction.

Bob swept us all up in a hug, which was unfortunate considering his current state. I broke it off immediately.

"It's good to be back! Now I need to hunt something large, vulnerable, and preferably female." He slowly exhaled. Fog started to pour from his mouth.

"What the hell is this?" he said, shocked, as he hurriedly tried to wave it away.

"All right, Bob, let me give you the rundown on your new parts and abilities." I said, trying to change the subject.

Bob's smile broadened more and more as I explained everything. By the time I was done I could tell he was just itching to try everything out.

The moment I had stopped speaking, Bob had taken off into the forest, just a blur of black fur and glowing red eyes. He was out of sight in almost a blink of an eye.

I looked out in the direction he disappeared into only to see a massive cloud of fog and hear fiendish cackling.

Well, it looks like I get to spend the day alone with the ladies.

I walked over to the remains that were strewn about while I was Fleshcrafting. I sat Lina down as she sighed in regret.

I Fleshcrafted the bear's skin, turning it into a pelt. I fashioned it into a small, simple tunic. I really needed a way to fully cure these; it would probably just be a few more days before the fur started falling out. I handed it to Leera.

She smiled up at me, hugging it close to herself as she spoke. "Thank you for the gift. Is there any way I can repay you?"

She grabbed my hand and pulled me back into the cave.

It looked like Pervy Guy's twin would be making his debut soon.

Chapter 24: All Together - Leera

I grabbed John's large hand and led him to the dark part of the cave. I heard Lina's talons on the floor as she ran to keep up with us.

It seems like lately all I have been doing is mating, sleeping and eating. In a way it's a truly enjoyable life but I know in my heart that John is meant to do great things. We won't always have this sort of time to just enjoy each other.

After my talks with Lina earlier I knew that it wasn't right of us to monopolize him. I have to push him to do more, to have higher aspirations than just day to day living.

With what I knew of my and Lina's reproduction, he would have more children than we could ever possibly take care of ourselves.

But right now, he had noticed I was uncomfortable without me even telling him and had already made something for me to wear. It's like he is attune to me, to us. He always does whatever he can to make sure we're happy and takes every opportunity to show us he loves us. It makes me so wet, I never could have imagined this sort of closeness was possible. That I would be connected to someone so closely.

I truly love him, and right now my body is the only way I can show him that.

I placed the fur clothes he had made for me on the ground and knelt on top of them. I swiftly undid the string that held his pants on.

Oh god, what's this? I saw him doing something, but I had no idea.

I was greeted by his new addition. My mouth dropped open, as I felt that familiar tingle between my thighs. Even with this he shows us that he's thinking about us both. Or maybe he intends to use them both on me. I reached a hand

between my legs as he tenderly grabbed my head in his hands, his fingers tangling in my hair.

He pulled my head close parting my lips with his tip. I moved the other one to the side, there was no way I could fit them both in my mouth. He pulled me into him, I could feel my throat muscles contract around it as I struggled to breath. I plunged out one of my spikes, I could breath through it for now. I wanted to satisfy him. The more turned on he gets, the more turned on I get. His pleasure is mine.

I felt Lina behind me gathering my hair together, she pulled it down towards her as she climbed my back.

I felt her hands tugging my hair as she straddled my neck with her thighs. She maneuvered his new one over my forehead. There was no way it would fit in a mouth as small as hers, but she began licking the underside as she used her hands and breasts to guide it .

He moaned as he got rougher with me. Forcing it in and out of my throat. I could tell he was getting ready to finish.

He suddenly pulled my head away, depriving me of my prize. He removed Lina from my back and roughly placed me on all fours. I felt his tongue sliding up and down my slit as he slowly moved his attention to my other hole.

Oh god, it was my turn now, I clenched my muscles as my body tightened at the new sensation.

Lina lay down in front of me, spreading her legs as if begging for my attention. I licked my finger and gently slid it inside her, while lowering my mouth onto her waiting clit.

She let loose soft moans while John slid his tongue into my ass.

I knew what was coming as I felt him get to his knees and place his member at my entrance. I felt the other one sliding up my crack as he thrust inside me. My body was his, he claimed me his from the moment I awoke and now I would give him everything.

He pulled back and I could feel him positioning the second one at my unused entry. He pushed forward slowly

this time. I felt my muscles resisting him, fighting to keep him out. No, I wanted him inside me. He grabbed my hair pulling me into him as he continued pushing forward. I could feel my eyes tearing up. I bit my lip hard enough to draw blood as I felt my muscles lose to his intruding member. He thrust all the way inside me, filling me up completely. I gasped as I felt myself spasming around him trying to get accustomed to his girth.

I removed my finger from Lina and moved her upside down so she could see John take me. I once again placed my mouth on her opening as she shuddered. her talons clamped together tightly as he began to move. I yelled out, my cries muffled as I buried myself in her, biting her inner thigh. She yelped as she took one of my nipples into her mouth.

John was breathing heavily as he increased his pace slamming into me. He clawed my hips like an animal as he began to thrust wildly. He's never been like this before, is it me? Does it feel that good to be inside me? I felt my skin heat up knowing that I was making him this way. Lina had already finished under me and now moved to look into my eyes. She reached up and pulled me in for a kiss. I let her small tongue explore my mouth as I was being violated.

I felt his lust almost palpable in the air as I heard our bodies meet, forcefully slapping together. I knew I was at my end, soon I would finish. I could feel him throbbing inside me. I would try to hold out, I wanted to finish together. I felt myself locking down on him as he pulled me flush against him. He ground himself inside me filling me with seed.

I came hard, finally releasing my orgasm. I let my head rest on the ground as my body went limp but he held me in place, refusing to let go as he continued to fill me. I felt it start to leak out of both holes. I felt full as my second wave of pleasure washed over me, this was different from before. It was like I was coming from both places, my orgasm making my ass more sensitive. I was screaming now, Lina

looked surprised. I hadn't felt anything this powerful since the first time.

He leaned over me, his seed still pumping into me and turned my head to kiss him. We kissed each other passionately as we finished.

He pulled me on top of him as he sat back, keeping us connected. He moved my hair from my shoulder as he kissed my neck. He held my chin in his powerful hands as we met eyes and we kissed.

After a few moments, I caught my breath. He gently moved out from behind me, his still hard members sliding free from their new homes as liquid gushed from me.

I sat there completely spent on the floor. With just this one time he had wrecked me, stained me with his love and claimed me, body and soul. I knew I could never belong to anyone else, I was his, the mate of a god.

Lina was on her knees between his legs cleaning him with her small tongue, while audibly breathing.

His eyes were still locked onto me as he guided her head with his hand. He stared into my eyes as if seeing into my soul. I could feel the power in his gaze, for a second I felt something else, something endless, vast and unchanging. My body surged with arousal as I remembered what we had just done.

He reached forward giving Lina's ass a hard slap as she cried out. He spread he ass apart and gestured for me to come over.

I crawled over, my legs and arms wobbling at the effort. I buried my face in Lina's ass trying to do as he had done for me. I forced my tongue in her small hole as I felt the heat coming off of her. To my surprise she pushed back into me eagerly.

She really was a little masochist. He picked her up and turned her around to face me. He lowered her ass down on his top member leaving the other one free. Her mouth was

open, her body was completely flushed. He thrust into her without waiting for her to get accustomed to it penetrating her ass in one go. She took him all the way to his base.

Tears were streaming down her face now but her eyes showed nothing but unparalleled bliss. She had the front member held between her legs. She clenched as she began rocking back and forth, moving herself along his length as his other one slid between her ample thighs.

I moved forward taking him into my mouth once more. I pushed forward until my nose was pressed into Lina's slit. She finally managed a whimper as I felt his seed filling my mouth. Lina hugged my head as she climaxed.

I kept swallowing as his other one gushed out from Lina. He shook in the heights of pleasure and sat motionless for a time. His seed finally stopped flowing into me. I pulled my mouth away. Lina was unconscious.

He softly pulled her off of him and laid her down in front of me.

"Heal her, I'm not done yet." He instructed. I kissed her tenderly, releasing my fog. As she breathed in her eyes opened again slowly, her hand caressed my face. I leaned back and John kissed her deeply.

She looked into his eyes warmly. You could tell they were in love. She looked embarrassed by her situation. He beamed down at her.

He got to his feet still hard. I knew now that he wouldn't be satisfied with just two times. He lifted me in his arms as if I weighed nothing. He lowered me onto my back, then grabbed Lina who was still gazing at him in complete adoration and laid her down on me, stomach to stomach.

He knelt between my legs spreading them open. He moved Lina while spreading her legs around my waist. She wrapped her wings around me, looking up at me excitedly, as if knowing what was about to happen. I felt her wetness dripping onto my still swollen slit.

I felt his tip touching my entrance, and judging from Lina's look of rapture she felt the same. Her wings gripped me tightly as I felt him pushing into me. As he went deeper I could feel Lina sliding up my body. I think he had already hit her depths. It wasn't long before I felt him reach mine. He grabbed my arms and placed them on Lina's shoulders.

"Push her down." He said in a commanding voice as he started slowly pulling himself back out again.

I slid her down my slick body until I felt her warmth on my pubic mound again.

"Are you ready?" He asked, his breathing quickening in anticipation.

"Yes." was all I was able to squeak out. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. I was taking gasping breaths. The anticipation was killing me. I couldn't believe it, he was about to mate with us both at the same time. He slammed himself forward pushing Lina up my body once more. She reached her hands out grabbing my breasts as she moaned out in pleasure. I looked into his eyes. He had a look of pure enjoyment as he made small, slow, deliberate thrusts. Keeping himself buried as deeply as possible inside us both.

As Lina slid slowly back and forth along my body she played with my nipples making me aware of their sensitivity. I could feel my walls start to quiver as Lina's fingers started to dig themselves into my nipples.

I couldn't take it any longer this slow hard penetration was driving me crazy. I could feel absolutely everything. It was like my senses were heightened as I felt a small shiver come over me. My body wasn't listening anymore, my head had grown fuzzy. I just can't wait. I need to come. I felt Lina's body tensing up on top of me, as a long moan slowly erupted from her lips. John twitched inside of me having heard it. I just can't last this time. I pressed Lina into myself as I came. I knew it was selfish of me but I had to. My body jerked as my legs stiffened and my toes curled.

John leaned down to me, kissing me as I felt him explode. All three of us writhed our bodies together as we were all finally connected. I felt a warm wet patch on my stomach leaking down my sides as he just kept pumping into us both. No sooner then My first orgasm subsided, I was rocked with another smaller one. His member still pressed inside me not letting my muscles relax. I felt his seed dripping down my crack as he pulled me to lay on my side, facing him.

I wrapped one leg around him, while my other one lay flat. He held Lina between us making sure he didn't slip out of her. He moved his arms up embracing me as he continued to pump endlessly into us. We all lay there still connected as he cuddled us together. I embraced Lina, her body felt like it was on fire. Finally his orgasm ended and he slowly pulled out of us.

I had no doubt now, after that, there was no way we weren't pregnant. It takes everything we have to satisfy him, and there's two of us. We must expand our flock. He needs many, many more mates.

He gently moved the hair out of my face and stroked my head while looking warmly at me. I leaned in and kissed him. He returned my feelings and brought Lina up to rest between our chests as we all kissed each other.

I can already tell this will be a family full of love.

Chapter 25: Scouting — John

I walked out of the cave satisfied. Doubling Pervy Guy had some unintentional side effects. My perversion had reached new levels. Literally — it was now level 2. *Does that mean I've now surpassed even satyrs in lust?* Great, double puberty, just what I needed.

Those strange sensations hit me again. Perhaps I should investigate them today. I'll add it to the list.

I called for Bob.

I saw a trail of red light that stopped suddenly in front of me, becoming Bob's eyes. Holy crap, just how fast had I made him? Blood was dripping from his mouth. He looked down at me expectantly.

"Hey there, Bob, how goes the hunt?" I asked.

He just laughed as he answered. "Boss, you're my hero; this body is great. I can kill something almost as soon as I see it."

"Awesome! Would you mind watching the cave while I'm out? I need to find us a new place to stay."

"But Boss, I thought I saw one of those bears you were talking about! It might be a lady," he said, offering an unnatural wink.

"All right, but come back as soon as you're done. I don't know when I'll be back. Please don't kill any goblins or necromancers at the moment, either; they might be friends." I said seriously.

"Aw, you're spoiling all my fun today." He looked depressed for a moment before making up his mind. "Okay, Boss, but just because you asked."

I waved goodbye to Bob and started exploring the mountain around the cave. Although I did have a map of the area, the map didn't really show anything as detailed as

caves or clearings, so I decided to check myself, all while scouting for possible dangers around us.

I managed to coerce a crow that was sitting in a nearby tree. I fed it the directions that I felt those pulling sensations coming from, and it sent visions back to me from its perspective. I saw myself flying in the sky over the forest. There was a small goblin village. I got the sensations of smell, as well, from this one; it was absolutely horrid. *I'm betting those buildings aren't made of mud, but a different substance entirely.*

It then flew right for a long while before coming to a clearing as if guided by an alluring smell. I saw several tents. There were men outside the tents. The crow sensed danger and landed in a nearby tree. I saw a pit filled with bodies. It smelled worse than the goblin village. *Ew, I guess it serves multiple purposes. I wonder if anyone ever fell in there while doing their business? Maybe that's where the bodies come from?*

I nodded to the crow and it flew off. I didn't know how long it had been since it was near those places, but these are the first non-necromancer humans I had seen. Judging from their outfits I guessed they might be soldiers. Somehow, someone from the camp was calling to me. I felt a pull there more powerful than the goblin village.

On the long walk back to the cave I decided to visit the dryad again to ask some questions.

The dryad formed from her tree and smiled at me. This time she chose autumn colors, making the vines and leaves of her hair different shades of yellow, orange, and red. It seems like she wanted to try to lure me once more as her breasts had grown in size and her nipples were erect.

Yep, she's a redhead.

I stopped my heart. I didn't need another woman trying to entice me.

The now-familiar scowl returned.

"Hey there, you." I said while smiling at her.

"Do you really have to do that? I absolutely hate undead things; not only can I not eat them, but they are an affront to the life cycle," she spat.

"Okay, as long as you promise not to try to drain me, because even if you tapped me dry, I wouldn't die. I would just become one of those things you seem to hate." I warned.

I started my heart back up, and she relaxed her posture, a natural smile coming back to her face.

"Well, what are you here for? I'm assuming it's not to cut off my head again," she said with a hint of anger still in her voice.

"I had a few questions for you about some settlements around the area."

"Uh uh uh. What do I get for providing this service? After what happened earlier, you can't think I'll answer for free," she responded, waving her finger back and forth.

What the hell would a dryad take as payment? Oh, yeah, this is another ploy to drain me.

"All right, I'll let you drain a little, but if I feel like you've gone too far, you're cut off — literally."

I held out my hand and she nervously took it. I felt a vine wrapping around my wrist, probing until it found a vein.

She began draining me, and to my surprise it wasn't just blood, but my mana pool. I saw my mana dipping at about 2 mana per second. If this was it I could maintain this for around an hour and a half, more with mana regen and passive mana-gathering.

She seemed to be in a state of extreme happiness.

"Ooh, you're not half bad-tasting, but my memory is foggy. I just can't quite think clearly about what might be in the area. Maybe if you let me use a few more vines my memory would clear up," she said with an innocent smile.

This damn dryad was still trying to hustle me.

"All right, you can add two more, but that's it." I said firmly.

Two more vines snaked up my arm with unrestrained enthusiasm, driving themselves into my veins like the first had done. I felt a much more substantial drain now. Like this, I could probably only hold on for a half hour.

She was rocking her head back moaning slightly her eyes glazed over. *Did I just accidentally give a junky her fix? Does she even need this to live?* I looked up at the majestic tree. My guess is no, no she doesn't.

"All right, lady, you owe me some answers." I said in a partial growl.

"Oh, that. I'm a dryad, you idiot, do you think I ever leave this tree? How the abyss would I know?" She laughed and the drain suddenly jumped up.

"Now die you, unholy half-dead," she shrieked as she gave her all to drain me. She ended up stopping after draining around 500 mana, give or take.

I just stood there looking at her. "Okay then, still alive here. Was that your big plan, drain a measly 500 mana from me and then act like a jackass? Because if it was, you've succeeded." I said in a flat tone.

"Measly!? This is more mana then the great forest spirit has. Anyone would be dead after that! By the abyss, it should have forced you to convert your own soul into mana just to feed it," she said as she stared at me with an undisguised look of horror.

"Nope, I still have 9,580 mana left and rising. If you don't understand mana numerically, I'll put it in simpler terms for your wood-filled head. You only got five percent. You could do that again twenty more times. So, yeah, measly works here." I said in a condescending tone.

She collapsed to the ground, her vines going limp in the process, but I still held her hand so she couldn't get away. I could still feel a drain, but it was under one mana per second. I think I may have filled her up.

I looked down at her catatonic face as she stared at nothing in particular.

I guess it's time my cave gains a new lady-shaped statue; I'm sure Bob could make use of it.

"Okay, time to die." I said as I dragged her to her feet. She wasn't even fighting me anymore — she just held my hand tightly and walked obediently behind me. I didn't even bother disconnecting the vines; this would be over with soon enough.

We walked for several seconds, the tree starting to disappear into the forest as we went. *Hmm, last time she was already a block of wood. What's happening?*

"Hey, sawdust for brains, what's happening here? Shouldn't you be a statue by now?" I asked in confusion.

She tilted her head back up at me as if she couldn't understand words anymore. "Heh, heheh," She just laughed dumbly at me. Did she overdose? I slapped her face, and to my surprise it was soft like flesh. Huh. I tried to use Fleshcrafting on the super-thin vines that made up her hair. To my surprise they responded and slowly became regular hair. I turned it all a bright red. It looked like I had full control.

I stopped where I was and began to shake her. She regained a bit of life in her eyes and looked at me in fright.

"Wh... Just where in the abyss is my tree!?" she shrieked in terror. She quickly tried to release my hand, but I held her tightly.

I slapped her again, not necessarily to calm her down, but because she just tried to kill me back there.

She brought her trembling hand up to her face and rubbed at the now reddening spot.

"A dryad cannot be separated from her tree, this is just impossible!" she said as looked around. A thought seemed to spring into her head as her eyes darted down to our clasped hands.

"No, no no no. This can't be happening. It can't be true! Oh, goddess, tell me this is a lie," she said in partial freak-out while raising our hands to her face.

The broken laughter started again as tears poured down her cheeks. She looked at me, her head cocked to the side, one eye twitching.

"You are my new tree," she said as manic laughter tore from her.

I think I broke the dryad.

"Just what the hell are you talking about? I'm not a tree." I said, confused.

I slapped her again — it still felt good — but before I could remove my hand, hers grabbed it, holding it to her now-soft face. A small line of blood dripped from the corner of her mouth as she spoke. "Dryads are parasitic. We naturally attach ourselves to the strongest power source, which until now was that huge tree over there. The amount of mana it gathers is incredible, but you just have so much that I must have subconsciously switched."

Oh great, Leera and Lina were just going to love this. I went for a walk, and now I'm coming back with a crazy mana-stoned tree-lady.

"Oh no, you're not coming with me. I'm marching you right back to your tree." I said as a bit of my panic seeped through.

"I, I can't. Not anymore. I'm afraid I'm more flesh and bone than tree now. It would take me years to change back with only the mana that the tree provides." She still held my hand to her cheek. It felt warm.

I think it's my turn to freak out now. I started feeling lightheaded. I used flechcrafting on myself. She had stopped drawing so much mana, but now she was drawing blood ravenously. It was a good thing I ate so much of that bear or I would already be in undead mode.

"All right, lady, just how long do you intend to suck my blood for?" I said as I looked at her.

I wanted to kill her, but at this point it didn't quite feel right.

"I'm almost complete. Just give me a little bit more," she said in an uncharacteristically pleading tone.

I felt the drain stopping gradually. Her once-bright-emerald skin was now only a slightly green color that clashed with her vibrant red hair.

Her vines withered and fell from my wrist, but she still held my hand tightly as if afraid to let go.

"Did you think I would let you drain me like this without punishing you?" I said as I gave her a sinister smile.

I melded our hands together. From what I had observed from the goblin youth, I was sure that Fleshcrafting was excruciating to anything that wasn't one of my flesh constructs. I added all of my abilities to her, including the mana-gathering hair and mana-regenerating heart.

She screamed and writhed on the ground, clawing at her chest and eyes. I made her eyes a bright orange color, adding a bit of red as the green she had originally mixed with the yellow of the wendigo.

I didn't know something could scream this much. I had to mend her self-inflicted injuries at least a dozen times. She actually tried to strangle herself once with her free hand. That was amusing.

She finally just lay there, gasping for air. I sat by her, lowering my hand to the ground.

"No more. Please, I've had enough. Please, stop!" she croaked and begged.

I used Blend. She let loose one last soul-shattering screech before losing consciousness. I used Fleshcrafting to wake her up.

"There, you're all done now." I said as I separated our hands.

Her eyes were glowing orange as she looked at me. She exhaled and a green fog came out, causing the plants it touched to grow and bloom.

"I've given you some mana regen and mana-gathering capabilities of your own. No need to be a damned parasite

anymore." I got to my feet and began to walk away.

She just lay there in a daze. *Great, if all she does is lie there she's definitely going to get eaten by nightfall.* I shrugged and started to take another step, then hesitated. *Shit!* I turned back around and walked back over to her.

I scooped her up into my arms and started my trip back to the cave. The whole time she said nothing. As I approached the cave I looked down at her. She was staring at me with a scared expression as she held tightly onto my harness as if afraid I would drop her.

It was starting to get dark. I picked up my pace.

I looked at the clearing in front of the cave. Bob was eating a large monstrous bear. *Let's hope that's all he did to it.*

"Hey, Bob, toss me a leg." I yelled as I threw the dryad over my back in a fireman's carry.

"Sure thing, Boss," he said as he ripped a leg off effortlessly and hurled it at me. I caught it one-handed and began to tear into it, putting my sharp teeth to work. I needed it after all the blood this wench had drained.

By the time I got to the entrance I had already eaten most of it. Leera and Lina looked up at me with widening eyes. They were both wearing their furs. I had a moment of clarity. *I'm a damned caveman.*

I made up my mind at that moment. We would definitely live in a house soon. I needed to talk to the humans in the area and establish relations so that my world could become more civilized.

I laid the dryad down on the floor, but every time I went to stand back up she grabbed my harness. I looked down at her and she looked back at me with pleading eyes. *Fine.* I picked her back up and sat down by the girls, letting her sit in my lap. She looked around with a fearful expression.

Leera was the first one to break the silence. "So the two of us aren't enough for you anymore, huh?" she teased.

"Oh no, this one won't be joining our family. She's tried to kill me, what, like three times now?" I said as I shot the dryad a spiteful glare. "She'll be on her merry way as soon as she gets out of this funk she seems to be in."

The dryad looked up at me afraid. Was it possible she understood English somehow?

Leera actually looked disappointed.

The dryad clung to me tighter as her lips began to quiver. "Please, don't leave me. I've never been this vulnerable before. Don't abandon me!" she spoke in a whimper full of urgency and desperation.

I ignored her.

Lina was now glaring at the dryad. Her expression promised violence.

My little amazon, trying to protect me. I gestured her over. She walked slowly, keeping her eyes on the dryad the whole time until she was right beside me.

"Miss Dryad, this is Lina. Lina, why don't you show her what will happen if she does anything crazy while she's our guest."

Lina shot out her spike and placed it under the dryad's chin, letting the point barely break the skin before she retracted it.

I could now feel the dryad shaking in my arms.

I smoothed down Lina's hair for a few seconds. She relaxed a little, but she kept her eyes fixed on the dryad.

"And if you somehow do manage to kill either one of them, know that I can bring them back. Then I'll throw you to Bob." I said as I turned my body. I motioned toward the exit and called out, "Oh, Bob, would you care to say hello?"

Bob's glowing red eyes appeared in the doorway instantly, but he was too large to come in comfortably.

"Yes Boss, what can I do you for?" He replied as he eyed the dryad hungrily. His twins began to grow.

"If this one does anything at all to any of us, you can rape, kill, and eat her, in the order of your choosing." I said

as I smiled wickedly at the dryad, gesturing between her and Bob in case she couldn't understand my meaning.

Bob exhaled a thick puff of fog as he spoke. "Thank you, Boss! And you, girly, please, oh please, do something stupid."

The dryad shrieked as her nails dug into my skin. Yep. She could understand us all right. *Okay, it's night night time for her.*

I exhaled a small amount of sleeping fog into her face. Her body relaxed as she went limp in my arms.

I got up and walked back to the altar that I first woke up on. I laid her down there. This'll be a nice surprise for her in the morning. I laughed an evil laugh as I rejoined my girls.

I didn't feel like the dryad was evil necessarily, but actions speak louder than words, and she had deceived me with the intention to kill me multiple times now.

She also had a high-and-mighty personality like the pretty girls from my world. Nothing pissed me off more than an unearned sense of entitlement. Just because she was born prettier than the rest of us, she thinks we all owe her something. Her personality was shit, and in this world I wouldn't tolerate it.

"Did you actually mean that, Boss?" Bob asked, obviously excited.

"Yeah, but only if she does something to harm one of us." I replied.

Chapter 26: Source One Investigation — John

I woke up in the usual way — Leera with her head on my left arm and her body pressed close, Lina on my chest, and this damned dryad on my right arm. *Wait!* No, this was not normal. I swiftly ripped my arm out from under the dryad's head, letting it hit the ground. I gently rolled Lina onto Leera, then softly and carefully moved my arm out from under Leera's head, ensuring I did not wake her.

The dryad somehow seemed to stay asleep even though her head had made an audible thunk. She simply cuddled up to Leera.

I would leave the three of them together today; I was finally going to go investigate the source in the human camp. It was quite a distance, and I had a terribly embarrassing idea for cutting down travel time.

I walked out of the cave. Bob was cuddling the dismembered monstrous bear corpse and periodically laughing in his sleep.

"Bob, oh Bob." I called.

He arose with a start and looked around until his eyes focused on me. "Boss! I wouldn't eat that if I were you," he said, pointing at the bear.

"Knowing you, I wasn't planning on it." I said with a chuckle.

We both laughed for a few moments.

"I have an odd request for you." I said hesitantly while considering the next words I would use. "Could I ride you?" I asked nervously.

Bob broke out in laughter before responding. "Gee, Boss, I didn't know you felt that way. What'll the girls say? I don't want them to think I'm a slut."

Damnit, I knew it would end up like this, but it was still better than asking if I could use him as a mount.

I sighed and rubbed my face with my hand as I responded. "You know what I mean, like a horse."

"I didn't know you did that with horses, too! Maybe you're the slut." Bob said, still chuckling.

"Come on, Bob."

"Isn't that what you're trying to do?" He was now practically cackling.

"Okay, okay, I admit it. You're just too damn pretty. I can't wait to get on top of you and pull your hair as I ride you in front of everyone." I said, now also laughing.

Bob abruptly stopped laughing. "Too far, Boss, too far. You should show some class when dealin' with the ladies."

"You're not a — oh, oh yeah. Sorry, man." I replied.

"I'm just joshin' ya. Throw that bouncy booty up here, and we'll go for a run," he said, smiling his beastly smile.

Bob laid down in front of me and I climbed on top of him. I grabbed his fur to keep steady as he stood. With our combined height, it probably put us at around eleven feet tall. Hopefully Bob would be conscious of low-hanging branches.

"So, where to?" he asked.

"It's quite some distance to the northeast. I can feel a pull from it, so we shouldn't have much trouble finding it once I'm closer. Judging by what the crow showed me, if I was on foot I would say it would be a day and a half's walk without stopping."

"Just to warn you, I can't keep up a maddening sprint forever. I'm going to have to pace myself." Bob warned.

"Still a lot quicker than me." I responded.

I pointed the way and Bob took off. I could hardly keep track of the trees we were passing and weaving through. If this was his idea of pacing himself, I would hate to see what it looked like if he went full speed.

We stopped once or twice so Bob could eat something small and fluffy to regain his energy. We lost a lot of time

trying to find a way around the river while still avoiding the goblin camp.

We reached the spot in the forest from the crow's vision just before nightfall. I dismounted Bob and had him lie down. I didn't want to spook or incite anyone. We looked at the camp in front of us.

Most of the tents were gone and the remaining men were taking down the rest. It still made me uncomfortable that they were all armed, as I couldn't honestly tell if they would be friendly or not.

I noticed now just where that pulling was coming from, and it seemed to hint at my suspicions. I was being pulled to the foul-smelling pit. I also felt a much weaker pull from a faraway tent.

"I'm going in there, but I would like you to keep an eye on me. If I call out for you by name, or if you see me fall, then kill them all, the bloodier the better," I said in a hushed voice.

"I've got your back, Boss. Besides, I've been waiting for a chance to go on a rampage for a while now."

I was human-looking enough to fool the necromancers, so I was sure I could accomplish the same here. *Let's see what this place is all about.*

I used the calming effect and stood.

I walked slowly into the open.

One of the guys who was taking apart the closest tent looked my direction, doing a double take before running off towards the far tent.

A few of the other men stopped their work and simply stared at me.

"Who is he?" a voice said.

"He looks like a barbarian, maybe a half-orc," another voice responded.

"Yeah, get a look at that weapon. What is it even made of?" a third voice chimed in.

A young man wearing heavy leather armor and a metal half-helm walked up to me.

"Stop right there! Our leader will want to see someone as unique as you," he said in a serious tone, his brows were knitted and his eyes murderous.

I stopped walking and spoke politely. "I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd say hello. There's no reason for alarm."

The man's hands rested on his sword nervously. It seemed like he was expecting to use it soon.

Nothing about this place seemed right. Everyone was a little too high-strung for my tastes. I looked around to the growing crowd of gawkers. Half of them had sneers on their faces, while the rest looked on with hate in their eyes. I could feel their bloodlust in the air.

The youth in front of me was now looking down at me with a sadistic grin. *Ah, they think they've caught easy prey but are still too unsure of their chances to attack.* They were undisciplined cowards. Maybe the leader would have more sense.

I heard screaming from a far tent. Was that female? I was starting to get antsy. These guys were definitely up to something. I used Life Sense. The man in front of me jumped back and drew his sword. Never mind this idiot. I ignored him as I looked for the source of the scream.

I saw two blobs in the far tent. It was obvious what they were doing by the motion.

I deactivated Life Sense.

I heard voices from the peanut gallery.

"What is he?"

"Were his eyes just glowing?"

"I don't feel right about this at all."

"Who would just walk into our camp like this?"

The man in front of me pointed the tip of his sword at my neck but stood motionless, sweat dripping down his face. He kept glancing behind him as if waiting for something.

The flap opened on the far tent, and a skinny blonde guy with a scraggly beard came sauntering out.

A man ran over to him and spoke urgently. The man handed him a belt with two blades on it — one dagger and one cleaver-like knife.

The blond man looked over in my direction as he tied on his belt.

He swaggered his way up to the swordsman in front of me, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"It's okay, Lenny, back down," he ordered.

Lenny sheathed his blade and moved to join the spectators.

"Well, well. It's not everyday we get a guest," the man said as he moved closer to me with a crooked grin on his face. "Relax, everyone here is just a little tense because we're a bit vulnerable right now. As you can see, we're about to move camps, so not everyone is present to greet you." He propped his hands on his blades.

"You may call me Thads," he said in a lordly tone as he held out one hand.

I took it and shook, but he didn't let go as he spoke again. "And you are?"

"Call me John," I told him as I eyed him suspiciously.

Something about this guy sent chills up my spine. His smile lacked all sincerity, like this was all a show for him, something he'd done numerous times.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Say, do you happen to have any coin on you?" he said inquisitively.

"No, I haven't needed any yet." I replied honestly.

He pulled me in as if to embrace me. A moment later I felt the sharp tip of his dagger tearing into my chest, piercing my heart and scraping against the thick bone shell surrounding my core.

I crushed his girlish hand. His face contorted in shock and pain. I punched him in the face, feeling his sharp cheekbone cave in as his jaw went sideways. As he fell back, I twisted

his wrist feeling the bones grinding together. I released him, letting him fall into a shocked slump on the ground.

My elder-god half seemed to be smiling.

I ripped the dagger free and held it in my left hand. I immediately Fleshcrafted myself and healed my wounds.

"Well, Thads, I have to say you're a pretty shitty host." I said as the men all drew their weapons and Lenny jumped out of the crowd at me.

I cast Weakness on all of them as I activated Dark Shroud, Life Sense and Soul Steal.

Darkness coated me as green flames poured from my eyes.

A few of them fell on their asses as the rest looked on in horror. But it seemed like many more formed up behind them out of the range of Weakness.

Lenny seemed to be able to shake out of Weakness's effect. He leveled his sword at me and glared into my eyes.

That was a mistake.

I used petrifying gaze. Lenny's jaw dropped open as his head tilted backwards in a frozen scream. Blood began to flow from his eyes as his stiff body hit the ground.

Oh, right. I can probably channel the abyss a little better than most.

Thads was now madly backpedaling. He winced each time he used his wrist. I saw him glow for a moment, and it looked like his jaw had returned to normal. I threw his dagger at him, pinning his leg to the ground as he cried out in shock.

I moved forward, drawing my weapon. I swung it in a downward arc to hit Thad's ankle. I saw the bones give in to the force of my weapon, the teeth digging deeply into his flesh. I sawed back and forth for a moment, starting the slow process of severing his foot.

"Where are you going, oh gracious host? You haven't even met Bob yet." I snarled as he wailed in pain.

"Oh, Bob! Why don't you introduce yourself to our new friends here?" I yelled.

Right on cue a thick fog began covering the area at a frightening speed. It was so thick that I myself couldn't have made out anything more than five feet in front of me without Life Sense.

Then the screaming started.

I heard terrible crunching noises as things rained down around me in wet plops. There was a powerful screech coming toward me from the sky, gradually getting louder as it approached.

A man landed about two feet away from Thads. The man looked at Thads in hopeless desperation as he reached his hand out to him. Thads looked back at him. The man was gone from the waist down. I saw the two glowing orbs of Bob's eyes appear for a split-second before the man was gone again and I was coated in a mist of blood.

I wiped my eyes before looking down to resume work on my host but found that my weapon was sunken into a thin severed leg.

Had Bob done that, or had the scrawny man done it to free himself? I used Life Sense, but there were too many blobs all moving in different directions. I had no clue which could be his.

I guess it's time to reduce the number of blobs.

I stepped into the fog and began swinging my weapon.

I felt something soft give way as my blade met flesh. I saw the body shoot off, hitting a few more and knocking them over.

I leaped over to the pile of screaming men hacking downward and noticed a man come charging from my left. I shot out a bone spike, parrying his blade as I brought my weapon around with my other hand, soundly decapitating him.

My head shot to the right as I heard more screams. I saw Bob mauling someone. Another man was running at Bob

with a spear. I picked up the head laying at my feet and threw it, hitting the would-be ambusher. I felt a sharp pain in my back. I turned to see a slender man in black holding a set of bloody daggers.

"Sorry, but those just won't do the trick." I said as my weapon swung around to meet him.

He feebly held his daggers as if to block, but the force went right through them, pinning his arms to his body as he went flying. He toppled end over end until he came to rest in a jumble of broken limbs. *I'll let Bob finish that one off.*

I ripped an arm off of one of the men in the minced pile in front of me. I ate without bothering to chew as I felt the wounds closing on my back.

The whole time I'd been fighting, souls had been regularly flying into me. I opted to use the rodent souls I had been saving to restore some of my mana — not that it was low, but sorting through all this later would be a pain.

I saw a large group of blobs in a circle about twenty feet away. Smart — they couldn't see, so they formed a circle.

I made my way there cautiously. The fog in addition to Dark Shroud would drastically reduce my visibility, but if they were looking right at me I could still be easily seen.

As I covered half the distance, sure enough a man called, "Here comes one! On me!"

They shifted to form a sort of improvised phalanx using self-crafted wooden shields. These men were different. Did they have military training? I got within swinging distance and they started to advance on me.

I used Dark Tendrils to root them all in place.

I casually strolled around their shield wall to their exposed backs and began hacking away. They screamed and pleaded as I moved down the well-organized line, striking the backs of their necks. Some were decapitated, but all were dead. The last one in line screamed the loudest, as I'm sure he knew what was coming.

I looked around, scanning for my next opponent. Most of the blobs were now lying on the ground motionless. I could make out two or three in the trees at the far side of the clearing.

"Bob, fog the trees." I commanded.

I saw the massive blob that was Bob appear suddenly in the clump of trees as fog overtook the forest.

As soon as he appeared, he was gone, and the screaming resumed from another direction.

I thought about what sort of soldier hangs out in trees. I leaned down and picked up one of the larger improvised shields. This one would cover me shoulder to shin.

I ran toward the treeline. When I wasn't too far away I heard something whistle past me. I held up my shield and continued my charge as a few more arrows thunked into it. The fog apparently did the trick here. Their accuracy was terrible. I raised my shield up higher as I got close.

I rammed into the closest one as his body flew back into the tree with a sickening crunch. The other two were up in the trees. I didn't know what to do. If only I had brought Lina.

I looked to the one I had just killed; he still held his bow. I remembered I had obtained the archery skill from the goblins. I rushed over to him, keeping my shield between me and the archers. I planted it in the ground, letting it lean over my head as I crouched by the fallen archer and retrieved his bow and quiver. I heard another thunk to my shield and one from the tree above my head.

I moved quickly behind the tree leaving, my shield. I knocked an arrow and peered at the human-shaped blobs through the tree.

I leaned out, quickly releasing my arrow toward the closest blob. It sailed over his head, hitting a tree behind his.

Well, goblin accuracy probably isn't that impressive. I knocked another arrow and leaned out from the other side

this time, letting it fly at the same target. An arrow hit my forehead but only broke the skin, unable to penetrate my skull. The archer wasn't as lucky, as my shot caused him to fall from his tree. I dodged back into cover and saw his blob dodge behind his tree.

I drew my bow again and stepped out from my tree, squarely hitting the last treed archer in the chest. He fell and lay unmoving.

I darted to the front of my tree and retrieved my shield. I ran to the front of the last archer's tree, using Stalk to move silently.

I heard labored breathing. I released my sleeping fog in large, thick gout. I heard his breathing slow as a scraping noise indicated he was sliding down the tree he was slumped against.

I moved to the other side and put my bone spike through his skull.

I ran my fingers along the sore place on my head. My forehead wound had already disappeared.

I collected his arrows, adding them to mine. I slung my bow across my back and gripped my shield. I looked back at the main camp.

The fog was starting to clear. There were no longer any moving blobs except for a few in some of the tents.

I made my way back. I didn't want to just barge into the tents killing everyone. That female scream from earlier seemed to hint that not everyone here was a soldier.

Bob was doing something unspeakable to the headless corpse of a fairly large soldier. I left him to it.

I approached the tent I had heard the screams coming from earlier.

There was only one small blob in this tent. I opened the flap as the smell of filth overwhelmed me. I saw a small, limbless girl tied to a bed by a rope around her neck. She had to have been in her early teens. Her face was badly swollen, blood leaking from one eye socket while her other

was swollen shut. I walked over to her and gently moved the hair off her face. She tried to move her head quickly, fleeing my touch. I continued to stroke her soft brown hair as I fought to keep my rage buried inside myself.

I felt the elder god calling out to me. It was giving me a feeling like, *Are we ready to consume this world yet?*

She eventually began to accept my touch as her breathing quieted down. I was doing this just as much for myself as for her. It calmed me down, as I could feel something unstoppable building inside myself.

I thought she wasn't that different from Lina. What if this was one of my girls cut limbless and used?

"I've killed them all." I said gently to her.

She tried to say something through her broken teeth, but I noticed she had no tongue.

"No one will ever do this to you again. I'll fix it, now rest." I exhaled my sleeping fog over her and she drifted off to sleep.

I tore out of the tent in a rage. They got off too easy! I had simply killed most of them outright. That was a grievous error on my part. They needed to suffer. *I* needed them to suffer.

I felt something warm dripping onto my chest. I reached my hand up. It was more of that black oily liquid.

A power surged within me. I felt a cold embrace as something began soothing my soul. It seemed to say, *If anything ever happens that you can't bear, I'll make it all disappear.*

I looked around, madly searching for Thads. If he was already dead, I would bring him back. He would pay. Then I would consume him.

I ran to the next tent that contained a blob. There was a big man with blood-stained pants cowering in the corner.

I rushed forward and grabbed him by his shoulders. I used my strength along with Fleshcrafting to tear his arms from his body.

I grabbed him by the throat and dragged him kicking and screaming to the young girl's tent.

"Did you take part in this?" I yelled as I used all my will to stop myself from killing him then and there.

"I... I..." He stammered.

I dragged him over to the still sleeping girl. I exhaled more fog over her face. She didn't need to be awake for what was to come next.

I activated Fleshcrafting.

The man shrieked in a high voice for his size as I removed bone, flesh, and tendons to rebuild the girl. He had a few heart attacks and at one point decided to bite off his own tongue, but each time I restarted his heart. I left him there, only a torso remaining as I went to retrieve his arms. I added them to the girl and sized them proportionately.

I imparted all skills and abilities to her, condensing the muscle and bone to give her unusual strength and resilience. As a last step I restored her maidenhead and added internal teeth. This would all soon seem like a nightmare to her. She now had one brown eye and one blue eye, however. I could change them both, but I wanted this bastard to see his own eye staring back at him when she woke up.

I used Blend to finish the process. She now had a shape like any other girl her age. I picked up some of the furs she was lying on and covered her up. I untied the rope and dragged the stumpless excuse for a man outside. *Though can I still call him a man now that I removed his pride?*

"Bob, a present for you. But don't kill him. He will still have a long day ahead of him tomorrow. Then an eternity as a torch." I didn't hide the anger in my voice.

"Boss, you can't mean to do that to him! You have no idea what it's like. You just burn there as you lose parts of yourself." Bob said in an almost pleading voice.

"They had a young girl chopped limbless and tied to a bed in that tent. She was lying in blood and feces. Thads

was raping her as we approached, and this guy also took his turn." I said in a tone that brooked no argument. "Why don't you describe to him what being a torch was like while you have your fun. Who knows, it might make him tense up more."

Bob seemed to smile as he dragged the man off.

I walked to the next tent with life. I found three more cowards between all the remaining tents.

I took each one to the girl, verifying their guilt before stripping them limbless part by part and handing them off to Bob.

As morning approached, Bob and I gathered up all the bodies and lined them up in neat rows and part groupings. I looked for Thads but I didn't see him among the dead. I would find him at some point, though. I felt an echoing sentiment from the elder god inside me. *When I do, he'll be my personal torch.*

I used Soul Steal on all the bodies, then on the bodies in the stinking pit.

The pulling feeling finally subsided.

I returned to the young girl's tent. I sat on her bed and resumed stroking her soft brown hair.

"Fa... ther..." She croaked as she leaned her head into my hand. The warm black liquid once again ran down my face as I suppressed my rage.

I closed my eyes and opened the soul screen. I needed to focus on something else.

I now had 55 souls.

I immediately converted the Sha'Dwarg into mana, but I was still saving the wendigo for a mana emergency.

My mana pool was now 10,088/10,088

I sorted through my remaining 54 souls.

There were:

14 souls of a petty criminal

8 souls of a trained infantryman

5 souls of a cutthroat

*7 souls of a trained archer
3 souls of a poacher
3 souls of a Garanthi sympathizer
4 souls of a tortured goblin
5 souls of a tortured villager*

At seeing the last groupings, I could tell I'd have my work cut out for me. *When I'm done this place will glow like a green-flamed sun with guilty heads.*

*1 soul of Lenny
1 soul of a Garanthi General
1 soul of a crestfallen coachman
1 soul of a devoted follower
1 soul of the wendigo*

I began stripping the petty criminals of their skills.

*Pickpocket: level 3
Target spotting: level 2
Knifework: level 2
Social engineering: level 1*

From the trained infantrymen I gained:

*Swordsmanship: level 5
Shieldwork: level 4
Spearmanship: level 3
Military tactics: level 3*

The cutthroats got me:

*Stealth awareness: level 2
Backstab: level 3
Ambush: level 3
Daggerwork: level 4*

I already had hide and Stalk, so those just went up one level.

The archers leveled up my archery to level 5, military tactics to level 4, and ambush to level 4.

The poachers brought my archery to level 6, hunting to level 4, and granted two skills:

Tracking: level 3

Traps: level 2

None had magic.

I left the souls from Garanthi sympathizers alone. I didn't know enough about this world yet to know if they were friends or foes. I only knew they came from the pit.

I opened my eyes. The girl was still asleep. I brought in the slaving torsos that had been the survivors. I had to fleshcraft a few, as they were bleeding copious amounts from their nethers. It was apparent that Bob had made additional holes once he got tired of the normal ones. I Fleshcrafted their lips together. God help them if they disturbed her sleep. I laid them in a neat row by the far wall.

I closed my eyes again and began to conduct interviews with the petty criminals.

Most of them just cowered, a few screamed, and some just hurled cocky insults at me until I informed them of their death and what was in store for them next.

Yeah, that lot was guilty.

The infantrymen were harder to crack. Quite a few of them just stared at me stone-faced until I opened one eye to show them the girl, then a few of them even broke down in tears, saying they never wanted to do it but they were ordered. One of them I recognized as the last one I had killed in that shield wall formation. He screamed when he saw me. He yelled it was all that Thads bastard's fault.

They were still guilty. Everyone has a choice, even if the alternative is death. They could have made a stand. Given the number of tortured souls I had, I knew they'd had many chances to stop this. But they didn't, and so they were guilty.

The cutthroats weren't any different than the petty criminals. *I hope they enjoy what's coming to them.*

The trained archers were like the infantrymen. One just kept repeating his name and rank.

It was sad, but they were guilty.

The poachers were the most normal of them, but they still admitted with shame in their eyes what they had done.

I spoke with the Garanthe sympathizers. They spoke Therossian with slight accents.

They expressed a deep shame and dishonor for what they had done. They informed me of a plan that they were working on to kill Thads and his group to try and stop it. When I told them of what was to become of them they just nodded their heads, saying it was a fitting punishment for them.

They were guilty, but they were trying to stop it.

I offered them a chance. I would erase their memories and use them as soldiers once more. Two of them agreed, but the last one just shook his head. He told me he deserved to burn. His honor wouldn't let him accept anything else.

These guys weren't bad, but they had done bad things. I would erase the memories of the one who opted to burn and keep him as a soldier in a new flesh construct. The other two were going to be mana.

I spoke to the goblins. After what happened with Leera, Lina, and their son from a previous life, I now knew that goblins weren't soulless fodder. They had feelings. They cared for their families just like humans. They bled, they felt pain, and they could even laugh like anyone else.

They were yelling and begging. One older-looking goblin readily hugged two smaller ones with spectral tears streaming down his face.

He looked up at me and spoke. "They kill us! They make me watch! They kill my little gobs, roast them. They make me see it!"

I could feel the black ooze flowing once more as if something was threatening to burst out from me.

I told them I would show them a beautiful sight soon, then I would make them new bodies, even better than their old ones, and guide them home. The goblin that was off to the side joined in their hug, and I nodded to them as I closed out of the screen.

I hesitated for a moment. I needed to get myself together for this next group. I couldn't greet them like this. I took a few deep breaths.

I opened the screen with the five tortured villagers.

They were all young, limbless girls. None of them could speak, as none of them had tongues.

By now I knew enough about how souls appeared to know that they manifest in the last the physical state they most remember being in. These girls had probably been kept in this state for a while — long enough to make them feel that this was their true form.

Most of them were crying, and one of them was making gurgling noises as if trying to talk.

I turned my head over to the torsos and opened my eyes. I then turned my head back to the intact sleeping girl.

Most of them began to smile slightly. The gurgling one managed something that sounded like a thank-you.

I told them what I would be doing with the rest of their captors, and they seemed at peace.

I would give them new bodies. I wouldn't let these mangled forms be their last memories.

I thought about trying to convert their memories into mana as I had done for Bob, but I could only go from the beginning, not in reverse, and I wanted them to remember their happy childhoods and their families.

I could still feel the warm liquid dripping from my eyes.

I felt a soft hand on my face. I opened my eyes.

The young girl was wiping my face.

"Don't cry," she said as she looked up at me with a small smile.

How could she possibly smile? My lip quivered as I looked down at her. She sat up and hugged me. As I sobbed into her shoulder, she hugged me tighter. Where did she find the strength? Even someone like me was reduced to a blubbering idiot by all this cruelty, and she had experienced it firsthand.

I pulled myself away while using the calming effect. I saw the black liquid fading into her body as her skin color turned a slight grey where it had touched her.

"It doesn't hurt now," she said as she examined her hands.

All I could do was nod.

She looked over at the torso collection at the far wall.

"Did you do this?" she said in a small happy voice.

I nodded again.

"I prayed a lot in the past week. First I prayed for money so my family could eat. Then I prayed for my sister's happiness when she left to marry the Duke's son." She stopped for a moment a tear formed at the corner of her eye.

"When the money didn't come and the coachman didn't return, my family prayed that my sister would be happy in Therossa's garden. Then they sent me to marry the Duke's son." The tears were now flowing freely from her small face as she continued. "I was a little too young, but they told me to say I was older. When I got here..."

I pulled her into my arms and let her cry into my chest as she continued her story in a muffled voice. "When I got here, Therossa stopped listening. The blonde one told me I looked a lot like another girl they had, just a while ago. I thought about my sister going through this. Then, earlier today, I prayed to something else. Something more evil than them. I wanted it to come and show them how it felt."

She looked up at me as I held her shaking body. "You came." She was now sobbing again as I felt my tears flowing as well.

That pulling sensation I could only guess was prayer — people calling the dark god inside of myself. If I had only come sooner, I could have saved more of these girls — at least one more.

Maybe I still can. I have their souls. I just have to take the next step.

"I'm here. I'll always be here. Until the world ends." I promised as I held her close for a while, until her crying lessened.

"I have so much more to do yet. These ones here are only the survivors. They will all burn, long after today. I will make this place a monument to their suffering. Not even the dead will escape this." I said as I once again stroked her long brown hair.

I spoke softly to her. "When this is done, I will take you back to your family, and you can forget this part of your life."

She pushed away from me. "My family is just as guilty for this as they are!" she said as she gestured to the torsos.

"They knew! They still sent me anyway!" she collapsed back into me, mumbling, "...and my sister, they knew then, as well. My mother wouldn't stop crying."

I rested my cheek on the top of her head as I let her cry.

"If you send me back, they will just send me out again," she said as she took deep, shuddering breaths.

"Then I won't send you back. But someday we will need to go to your village. We have to stop this from happening anymore." I replied while I laid her down and covered her back up. She reached her hand out and held mine.

I breathed some more of the sleeping fog onto her. Sleep would bring her the comfort that I couldn't.

I could feel her still gripping my hand in her sleep as if taking solace in the fact that I was still here.

Chapter 27: Devotion and Recompense — John

I closed my eyes again. Now that I knew what had called me here, I knew what I was likely to find when I clicked on soul of a devoted follower.

It was another young limbless girl. She had hair like the girl who was holding my hand — long, wavy, and brown.

She was different; she wasn't crying. She had a pure look of defiant hatred in her eye.

I opened my eyes to show her the sleeping girl holding my hand, then I got up to show her the cowering, sobbing torsos as they writhed and squirmed under my gaze.

I then sat back down and took the young girl's hand once more before closing my eyes again.

Her eye now shone with a tender expression as ethereal tears cut long streaks down her face. She gave me a broken-toothed smile.

"Try to remember what you used to look like." I told her.

She closed her eye as another tear ran down her face.

Slowly, she regained her arms, followed by her legs. She opened both her eyes as she looked warmly at me.

"Thank you! You finally came for me," she said as she approached me in spectral form. I could almost feel her as she embraced me.

I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude coming from her soul as it burned brighter.

"You even saved my sister."

She lifted her head to look at me. She was beaming from ear to ear. It was the second-most beautiful smile I had ever seen.

"As agreed, I am yours. Please take every bit of me. Being a part of you is my only wish." She again pulled herself into me.

My elder-god side surged with a warm feeling as if welcoming her. I could see something in her eyes, a true depth. I could feel our souls merging as we embraced. She was speaking the truth. She was mine now, for better or worse.

I had to speak before this went on too long. "I'm not done yet with my side of things. I'm still missing one."

"You've saved my sister. Even if that was all you did, it's enough. You may eat me, consume me, or send me to the abyss, but I will still be yours."

I couldn't let her do this. "I still need to get Thads. I won't accept your offer until then."

Her face contorted in rage. "Thads," she hissed through clenched teeth as she moved away from me.

"In the meantime, I can make you a new body, and you can take care of your sister."

"No! Not after what he did to me and all those others. He needs to pay!" she yelled as her lithe body shook in a tempest of rage. "I still remember it, all of it. He threw me in that pit while I was still alive! He reduced me to a sick plaything for him and his men. He killed me over and over! If you put me back in a body, don't make it the body of a weak girl, make it something that can cause him pain! I don't care how grotesque or monstrous I become! I just want him to see me and know fear before he dies in agony." She was hyperventilating now as she spoke.

I saw her soul flare up as if consuming itself. I needed to calm her down before she burned away.

"Mors! Can I show her a memory?"

"Yes, Master. You can't directly implant it, but you can show her."

"Show her my encounter with Thads." I ordered.

The black background began playing what had happened from the introduction to his escape.

As it played, her flames died down.

She turned back around and smiled her broad smile once more.

"I promise, you can help me kill him. Afterwards he'll burn away to nothing in screaming, inescapable agony. I will make this happen, for you and for the rest." I said as I mentally moved forward to embrace her. She opened her arms and accepted it. When I went to exit, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed me as she faded away, leaving only the soft touch of her lips.

For some reason, that made me feel better.

I released the small girl's hand and went about my gruesome tasks as I interviewed the remaining two souls.

I first interviewed the coachman. He had mentioned his part in this scheme, and I agreed to convert him to mana instead of burning him.

Mana 10,118/10,118

The Garanthi General was a strong, honest man. He talked about the plot he had initiated and informed me about his death by betrayal. He also told me that he never touched the girls except when he tried to put them out of their misery.

I told him about the fate that awaited him. He thanked me for a chance to clear his honor and nodded, accepting the fate of burning away. I guessed his culture worshiped honor instead of deities.

It looks like I've got another soldier.

I had Bob running around gathering tent poles and sturdy branches to drive into the ground as I walked the line of bodies, severing heads.

When I got to Lenny's body, it was still cramped up and frozen in an eternal state of terror.

I opened Lenny's soul so he could watch me decapitate his body. I had nothing to say to him, and he wasn't speaking much anyway; it was all just sobbing and begging for forgiveness. I closed out of it after I had mounted his head on the center pole.

After all the heads were mounted, I walked the line with my eyes open, matching souls to heads and making sure they saw both their own heads and the flaming line of heads behind them as I bound them.

It was now around sunrise; Bob and I had worked through the night.

I stood in the middle and activated Soul Steal while looking at the sky, careful not to undo my own work. I heard their wailing cries and lamentations. A few even cried my name, begging frantically to make it stop.

I canceled Soul Steal and yelled, "There is no stopping this anymore! You're all just heads now. Did you stop when they asked you? When they begged and pleaded through broken teeth and partial tongues? Enjoy your eternity. Lose yourself in it and burn away to nothing!"

Bob was staring at me with a complicated expression.

"They aren't you, Bob. These guys deserve this." I said to him softly.

Bob nodded but said nothing.

The young girl came out of the tent yawning.

She looked around, her jaws agape for a moment before running up to me. She grabbed my hand in both of hers.

"Can they feel that fire?" she asked.

Bob answered. "Yeah, trust me. It's worse in that form than in your body. At least when you're alive you can pass out when the pain gets too great. Here, there's no escape. Boss even made them keep their awareness. Even Dipshit wasn't that cruel..." Bob trailed off at the end.

She looked up in wonder at Bob, as if astonished that he could speak.

"Can I talk to them?" she asked while staring up at me.

"Yes. They can't talk back, but they can hear you." I answered.

"I'm going to go look!" she said as she pulled me along.

To think just yesterday they were watching her suffer — now she gets to see each one of them in an even worse

state as she frolics around with a radiant smile, her body whole and healthy.

I opened the soul window and brought forth the tortured goblins, the tortured villagers and the devoted follower. I think they all should see this.

I opened my eyes as she led me from head to head, identifying who did what and gloating at them.

Of the souls I opened, all watched the scene in front of them. The village girls were crying as they smiled their broken smiles. The goblins simply held each other as their eyes misted over. My devoted follower was sitting down with her hands covering her face as tears fell.

The young girl lingered for a minute by Lenny. The souls gasped. Some swore in anger; the rest just screamed.

I played them my memory from earlier, both of how he died and what I did when setting up his head.

I heard cheering from the goblins and my follower.

The girl finished her tour of the heads.

I closed out of the soul screen.

I dug around the bodies a little and pulled out a large cloth shirt. When she put it on, it went down to her knees. I pulled out a belt and handed it to her. She fastened it.

She now looked like she was wearing an ugly brown dress. Well, beggars can't be choosers.

"I have to get to work on these bodies now. I need to bring the good ones back."

"Can I play with your dog?" she asked.

"Uh." I shot Bob a glance, and he shrugged. "Sure, maybe he'll play fetch or something. Just scream if he does anything weird."

She ran off laughing. *It's hard to believe she can be so happy.* I smiled as I watched Bob lie down so she could pet him.

I started Fleshcrafting.

I opened the tortured villager souls one by one. I had them visualize their bodies before all this. They gradually

regained their normal appearances.

"Mors, we have templates here; help me recreate their bodies."

I felt myself lose control of my own body once more. Mors moved with her normal uncanny speed. *No, now it's faster — this must be the increased perception of time ability from the Sha'Dwarg.*

She perfectly completed each body, and as she did I Blended them and gave them all of my abilities except fog and Life Sense.

If they go back to their village breathing fog with glowing eyes when they're mad, they might be ostracized or even burned as witches. Do they even hunt witches here or is that just a normal vocation? Well, either way, they will have mana regen, mana gathering, night sight, increased strength, exceptional hearing and smell, and a ghoul/wendigo stomach.

Now that I think about it... "Mors, one revision. Give them a lower set of teeth, like Leeras, and restore their maidenheads."

They won't be able to heal from it like Leera, but I'm sure it beats the alternative.

The first girl was fairly tall but very skinny, maybe late teens. She had shoulder-length blond hair and chestnut eyes.

The next two looked like another set of sisters. One was taller than the other by maybe a foot. They both appeared to be in their mid-teens. They had thick, short, black hair.

The next one was short, early teens at most. She had natural red hair with blue eyes and cute freckles.

The last one was also blond, and her hair looked as though it had never been cut. She was slightly shorter than the first one but seemed older, as she had a curvier body. She may even be in her early twenties. She had brownish-green eyes.

Mors and I worked well together now. She seemed to automatically know when I wanted control of my body back. She then resumed when I was done with my part.

I gathered shirts and belts, pants for the ones tall enough. I laid the clothes that best matched their sizes next to their bodies.

"Mors, teach them English."

I dragged their souls over the bodies that matched.

I turned my back as they opened their eyes.

"There are clothes for each of you; I'm not sure how well they'll, fit but tell me if you need anything." I spoke as kindly as I could with my deep voice. I didn't want to scare them or have them think I wanted anything sexual.

I felt several warm arms wrapping around me from behind as they all hugged me. Some had tears in their eyes, while others just seemed happy that it was over. I took my time to hug each one individually and rub the small ones' heads, mussing their hair around.

I told them all about their new abilities. To my surprise, the skinny one knew some ice magic. Nothing impressive, but she could chant to create a small icicle and shoot it about a foot. This was the first time I had seen any elemental magic. The wendigo's magic didn't count in my opinion, as it was just fog.

I looked around for Bob and the younger girl. They flew past me in a blur of black fur and giggles.

"Okay, girls, go play with Bob and... uh..." I didn't know her name. *Why do I never ask someone's name? This must be a habit from my past life when I was an antisocial loner.*

"Bob." I called.

Bob and the girl stopped in front of me. The girl flew off Bob's back, but he dove and caught her. She was still laughing hysterically.

I walked up to her. "My name is John. What's yours?" I asked.

The girl's laughter slowly stopped, and she shot me an ear to ear smile just like her sister.

"John's a funny name." She laughed and made a face before continuing. "My name is Roscia." As she finished speaking, Bob once again placed her on his back.

"All right, girls, go play with Bob and Roscia." I said as some of the girls ran up to Bob, petting him and trying to climb him, while the older ones just watched.

The skinny one seemed to lose interest and walked back over to me.

"Is it okay if I watch you work?" she asked while tucking her hair behind her ears.

Now that I took the time to look at them, they seemed to have a slight, almost unnoticeable point. *Oh god, is she an elf? Did I just meet an elf? For some reason I didn't expect to see one here.*

I could feel my face start to smile. It had taken long enough. So far the only fantasy creatures I'd seen had been trying to kill me or someone I cared about.

She let out a girlish laugh before speaking. "That's the first time anyone has ever smiled after seeing these." She gestured to her ears then continued. "Elves haven't exactly been popular since they disappeared a few centuries ago. Our national religion even changed because of it. Now whenever something happens they just blame it on elves."

I wasn't overly fond of elves myself; I always thought they were too cliché. But now seeing one in front of me I couldn't help but want to touch her ears.

"Can, uh, can I touch them?" I awkwardly asked.

She came closer and bowed her head slightly. I reached out and stroked them to the points, pushing down a little and feeling them spring back. Mors really does move fast — how had I not noticed these when I was making her body?

The tops of her ears started to flush red. *Oops, I guess I had better stop.*

"I'm not a full elf. It's just some distant ancestor of mine. The only real benefits I get are that I'm a lot older than I look, and I can do a tiny bit of magic," she said as she looked at me. I could see her sweating. Was she nervous?

"That's okay! I'm part elder god, part human from a different world, part ghoul, rock troll, wendigo, Sha'Dwarg, normal guy, and a double serving of satyr." I said as I counted them on my fingers.

She gasped at that last part and looked down to my crotch. Like always, the twins liked the attention. She knitted her brows and brought her hand up to her mouth, shaking her head. Her expression seemed to say that she felt sorry for me.

"That's terrible, especially that last part." She still had pity in her eyes as she spoke.

Really, that's the part you're choosing to focus on? Just going to blow off the elder god thing, huh?

Well I guess after what she's been through, it would seem terrible.

"Don't worry about it, I'm all flesh golem, regardless of the parts I use." I reassured her.

"Now then, I have to get back to work." I told her as I walked over to the nearest body.

She followed behind me.

"Mors, let's do the same with the goblins."

I opened all the goblins souls one by one.

I started up Fleshcrafting.

Mors began crafting the goblins' bodies expertly. I stopped her. I remembered back to what the lusty goblin that became Leera said when she saw her body. I also remembered how Lina loved her body.

"Mors, let's make handsome and attractive super-goblins." I heard her snort to suppress a laugh.

I know that wasn't the best line ever, but that was my intention.

"Of course, Master," she replied while snickering.

She changed what she was doing to create well-proportioned goblins. The old goblin now looked like a mature gentleman with a nice, stylish, grey head of hair. The other adult goblin now looked like a short, curvaceous green woman with long, silky, yellow-green hair. The two kids now looked decidedly male and female. All of them were at least half a foot taller.

I added bone spikes on one arm and all other abilities. I wasn't entirely sure what a goblin was going to do with mana and fog, but something may manifest some day.

I showed each goblin the body I had made for it, and they all seemed to be overjoyed. *I guess goblins have self-esteem issues. Maybe from years spent at being the lowest sentient on the totem pole.*

I had one last thought.

"Mors, teach them English."

I dragged their souls onto their bodies.

They looked at themselves, then at one another. The old man embraced his children once more as they cried and jumped up and down. The female walked over to me provocatively and gestured for me to bend down.

I got to one knee and she pulled me into an embrace as I felt her tears on my shoulder.

Just like I thought; they aren't any different than anyone else. If anything they're just more honest with their feelings.

I went to stand up but the female wouldn't let me go. I stayed there for a moment.

"Thank you!" I heard another sob before she continued. "Thank you so much." She finally pulled her head back as she looked into my eyes. Her eyes were the color of gold and honey. I hadn't changed them, so that was probably a combination of goblin red and wendigo yellow. They were beautiful. I wiped the tears from her smooth, angelic face and pulled her in for another hug.

The old goblin walked over to me. The kids were behind him playing with their bone spikes. "So, you like my

daughter that much, huh?" he said as he slapped my shoulder two quick times.

I snapped out of my stupor. I now knew why the elf girl looked at me with pity. *It's only been a day and my little heads are leading my big one around like a show-dog.*

I broke off the hug and stood up in a hurry, accidentally slapping her in the face with my now full-sized twins.

The female goblin placed a hand to her face as she inhaled deeply, her eyes went feral. She reached forward at a speed that increased perception of time couldn't even track and pulled down my pants.

The twins sprung out at full mast, but this time she dodged backwards, barely avoiding a second hit.

I must have given her the IPT ability, as well.

Her eyes immediately began glowing. She wiped drool from her mouth, and it looked like she was ready to pounce.

I quickly leaped back, skillfully pulling up my pants in mid air. When I landed I quickly threw out a hand.

"Stop, stop! I already have two mates. I won't do anything with anyone else without their say so." I said feebly, my resolve fading by the second.

The old man stepped between us and spoke. "You just marked her, expressing your desire to mate."

"I just what!?" I asked in confusion.

"You made her smell your seed," he replied.

I looked down at my pants. Oh, yeah, I hadn't really washed these at all, and I have been having sex regularly then just putting them back on. *There are no laundromats around here, what am I expected to do?*

This does kind of explain some of Lina's behaviors, though.

He cleared his throat and continued in a refined diplomatic tone. "You're clearly aroused. I really don't think any misunderstanding is possible here."

I looked down. The twins were threatening to burst the seams of my pants. I really didn't have the willpower to

resist her. Besides, Leera had been heavily hinting that I should have more mates.

He lowered his hands and moved away. The goblin female was still breathing heavily as she moved her hand to her crotch.

"Okay, this is about to be very *not* kid-friendly." I pointed her to one of the empty tents and continued speaking. "Go and wait in there, and I'll be there soon." She moved towards the tent, moving her hips seductively as she walked.

Did Mors do that, or was she already inclined to do so? Ah, well, I guess body language is part of the English as well.

"Damnit, Mors, too sexy on that one."

I heard her cute laugh. "Would Master prefer it if she was still ugly?"

She had a point there, but unfortunately I would probably still be okay with it.

I heard a wolf whistle and turned to see Bob and the kids, as well as one extremely surprised elf woman.

"So, you do have two of them?" she asked with her eyes glued to my crotch. "Both satyr?"

I ignored her and walked to the tent. I wasn't going to get anything else accomplished in this condition.

Chapter 28: Goblin Mate - John

To my surprise she could fit more than Lina.

We mated at least two times, but my twins wouldn't back down.

I looked down at her. She straddled me, her feet on the floor on both sides of my waist. Her legs made an M shape. I was buried deep into both of her holes as she sat there unmoving.

I reached up and ran my fingers along the smooth light yellow skin of her stomach. I cupped one of her breasts. These were D cup at least. I guess there was plenty of fat to work with here.

She moaned and leaned forward into me as I began to move my hips again. I felt her insides sticking to my shafts.

I sat up and pulled her hair back, tilting her face toward mine. I leaned in and kissed her. At first she didn't know what to do, but now she takes it eagerly.

I continued pumping slowly into her as we explored each other's lips. I could feel her moaning into my mouth as another powerful orgasm rocked her body. She dug her heels into me as her fingernails scratched my sides.

Goblins definitely have a hair trigger.

I rolled her over as she kept her legs clamped onto me. I leaned over her and thrust into her with everything that I had making wet sloppy sounds as each thrust pushed out more of my seed from last time.

She was whimpering now as she put her hand to her mouth and bit it. I kept driving into her mercilessly. With each thrust we scooted along the ground a little farther.

I could feel my head pressing flush against her cervix. I pressed down hard and held it there. I could feel her slowly parting as I entered her true depths.

She screamed wildly raising her head up and biting my shoulder. I continued to move my hips in small motions staying inside her womb as I felt my blood running down.

She lay back with tears in her eyes and blood dripping from her lips.

I leaned in and she kissed me hungrily. I stopped thrusting as the suction from her muscles contracting around my tip was about to send me over the edge.

She bit my lip and sucked it hard as I felt her coming again. It seemed like all of her muscles where trying to suck and tease me from both holes. I thrust in again hitting her wall. She wailed digging her nails deep into my flesh as I came for a third time. This time I didn't feel any of it gushing back out. She managed to take it all.

Her eyes were still glowing as she looked at me with a pleading expression. I slowly pulled out of her cervix, feeling a slight pop as my seed gushed out of her and she finally relaxed.

I lay there on top of her as she breathed heavy breaths. She reached her hand up to my face and spoke. "Kiss?" I leaned down and kissed her, tasting my own blood as it intermingled with our saliva.

As we lay there exploring each other's mouths I could feel her muscles moving again, like a wave pulling me back in and massaging me. I felt myself getting harder again. Even though I was just laying there inside her I was still getting this much stimulation.

I began slowly rocking my hips as I felt my orgasm building. Her muscles contracted quicker as if to match my pace. I felt the pressure building inside me and stopped moving. She began moving her hips under me grinding our bodies together as the waves kept coming.

Finally I had an intense orgasm as her muscles kept going. I felt myself pump endlessly into her flooding her with everything I had. It started to flow out and I felt her come under me.

We just stayed hooked together in an orgasm that didn't seem to end for several minutes. Her voice just kept getting louder and louder as it kept going. Finally she thrust her hips into me hard enough to lift me up as she jerked uncontrollably. Our orgasms finally ended as I grudgingly slipped out of her.

I had the feeling that if I stayed inside of her, her muscles would milk me dry.

Chapter 29: Preparations — John

I lay by my goblin mate as we caught our breath. She snuggled into my right arm, burying her face in my armpit and inhaling deeply.

"I love your scent," she said while slowly exhaling.

Right. Goblin customs are different.

She turned herself to the side and gave me a cute smile. Her eyes glowed softly in the light from the open flap.

Wait, why is that open?

My head shot down quickly to look, only to catch a brief glimpse of blonde hair as the flap closed.

I have a pretty good idea of who that was. It's probably better if I don't mention it, though; she was likely just curious.

I cradled my goblin mate close.

"So, my name is John, and what do I call you?"

"John," she said as her mouth curled into a smile. "John is a strong name." She spoke seductively with a strange accent as she ran her hand up and down my chest. "Gobs don't have names. We use sounds to tell each other apart. In Goblin my name is — " She made a very brief, cute chirping sound like some of the chirps and yelps that I occasionally heard when goblins speak.

"Why don't you name me something in your beautiful language?" she asked as her predatory smile returned.

Oh god, why! Why? Okay, think; this girl is pure modified goblin. Like goblin the next generation. Goblin, next. Linex... No, that's a damned operating system. How about just Nex.

"I will name you Nex." I said while feigning confidence.

"Oh, I like it!" she said as she leaned up, giving me a nice view.

She climbed on top of me and we kissed again for a few moments as I enjoyed the feeling of her soft body on mine. I

ran my fingers up and down her back, softly caressing her for a while.

I dressed and we exited the tent.

I looked down at her as if to confirm what I felt in the tent. Standing just slightly under four feet tall, she was the very definition of voluptuous. It made me want to ravish her again, and the fact that she took both the twins at once spoke volumes about the attraction she had for me.

I knew that for goblins reproduction was one of the highest priorities. It was basically the keystone of their survival. They just produced so many offspring that it exceeded the number of them that were slain — at least if my fantasy knowledge was to be believed.

I needed to get her dressed again so I would stop thinking about her curves and get back to work. I still had two soldiers to make.

As I dug through the bodies to find a shirt and belt for her, I decided to ask her about how goblin society viewed relationships and what a mate meant to her.

She spoke to me in a flirty tone about this and that for a while then started to inform me more about how her culture works.

Apparently, goblins are a sort of patriarchal tribal society. An especially strong male was expected to have many mates, as they would provide stronger offspring. A particularly strong female was something of a treasure and would be obligated to accept only the strongest mate and refuse all others.

Goblins didn't have any racial biases to mating and were able to reproduce with pretty much any other organic sentient and a few non-sentients, creating several different clans with different abilities.

From this revelation I was able to guess where several other races came from. I guessed that a goblin-human pairing would make a hobgoblin, a goblin-gnome would yield

a gremlin, a goblin-lizardman would yield a kobold, and so on.

I wondered what a goblin-me pairing would create. Would my children have Fleshcrafting? There has never been a living undead before — meaning there had been no flesh golems that were able to reproduce.

All goblinoids matured quickly. Pure goblins were walking a day after birth and hunting small game a month after that. The goblin language was infinitely simple, and they picked it up quickly.

Average goblin pregnancies lasted for three months; goblin females were constantly ovulating on almost a weekly basis.

From what she was telling me, the oldest goblin she had heard of was around thirty years old. Her father, who looked quite elderly in his original form, was only in his twenties.

Once a goblin could hunt and scavenge, they were left to their own devices to survive. They were also expected to bring back some of their food to the village for expectant mothers.

The children were raised almost communally after they could walk, but families still stayed together in the same dwellings and shared food until the children could hunt.

They had almost no sense of modesty and were expected to mate publicly, both so the male could show his dominance and to serve as a method of sex ed.

The dark side of goblin society was quite substantial, as well. Every now and then, a party formed of single male goblins would go out hunting to capture viable females for reproduction, keeping them captive for mating until the females died or were unable to bear children. They had no qualms about eating other sentients. They were also cannibalistic, eating their own dead to sustain food stores.

Her village in particular had problems with famine. They had hunted all local game and had to travel farther and farther to find food.

I asked her about fishing, farming plants, and domesticating animals, and she just looked at me with a puzzled expression.

I wondered then how hard would it be to take over her village and teach them how to be more self-sustaining.

I would provide the goblins with security and guidance while providing a safer place for my mates and my children. My children may even mate with the goblins, making something new entirely.

As I let these thoughts linger in the back of my mind, I set about converting the two unworthy Garanthi sympathizers into mana.

Mana 10,179/10,179

I converted the memories of the worthy Garanti sympathizer and the general into mana.

Mana 10,221/10,221

I let them keep their skills, though I checked them anyway.

Garanthi Sympathizer skills:

Blacksmithing: level 1

Spearsman: level 1

Axeman: level 2

Shieldwork: level 4

Swordsman: level 5

Military tactics: level 6

Garanthi General skills:

Spearsman: level 2

Shieldwork: level 5

Axeman: level 7

Military tactics: level 8

Neither of them had magic.

I thought for a long while about how to create their bodies. Should I make them agile flyers? No, their skill sets

would probably go to waste, and if I've learned one thing here, it's not to underestimate archers. They both had impressive weapon skills, so I wanted to keep them in a human-like form. Ogres, maybe. No, I was sure this world already had those. If I had some large bulls perhaps minotaurs. Sure, I could create minotaurs out of what was here, but it just didn't seem quite right.

There were two of them, and I was already headed down the path of giant humanoids. A thought occurred to me. I remembered that I once heard a story about two Oni, one red and one blue. I don't think this world has those, at least not the versions I was about to create.

I gathered ten of the strongest-looking bodies together. I stripped them and set them in two piles of five.

This was going to be a lot of work, and if I didn't want to burn the rest of my daylight on it, I had better ask Mors for a hand.

"Mors, we're about to make two Oni. Use what you can from my memory."

"Yes, Master."

I felt my body start moving on its own. I pulled and ripped parts apart and fused them back together as I added more. I packed the muscle in the places it needed to go and reinforced it. I combined bones and heavily condensed them. Mors had to go to the parts pile a few times to get more limbs as a result.

She made their faces great and terrible. They had heavy brow ridges. Long sharp chins and angular features. The red one had a long shock of white hair that seemed to burst from his head. The blue one was completely bald.

I added large fangs that angled out slightly and started modifying their lips to give them their trademark grimace. I enlarged their jaws and made their mouths large.

I gave the red one two curved, medium horns on the side of his forehead and the blue one a massive cone-like horn

jutting out from the top of his forehead. I made the red one's horns black and the blue one's horn white.

Their heart sizes were almost as large as Bobs, so their mana regen would be around ten.

An idea had been festering in the back of my mind for quite a while. *Why don't I create armor?*

I had full control of their bodies, and it seemed feasible as long as I understood what I was doing well enough. I felt like I could accomplish it.

I thought about how calluses formed on the bottom of your feet and how the skin created them.

I reinforced and thickened their skin several times, making sure to leave their joints free. It gave their skin a sort of plated look, almost like armor.

I decided to test it out before infusing their souls. I shot my bone spike into one of their legs. It went through, but I could feel a strong resistance. I then picked up a nearby sword and preformed a medium-powered chop. It cut the skin but didn't make it to anything vital; they probably wouldn't even bleed from a wound like this.

This armor might not be ideal, but it was a lot better than normal skin. I tossed the sword aside and mended the damages.

I added all of my usual abilities and used Blend to make them complete and genetically homogeneous.

I gave the red one blue eyes and the blue one red eyes.

I stopped Fleshcrafting.

I took a look around. It was around mid-afternoon. My new elven friend was watching me with rapt fascination. I felt like she needed a notepad in one hand, as she seemed to be studying everything I did.

The goblins seemed to have taken this time to arm themselves. They all had bows and quivers. The mature gentleman had a sword on his waist that nearly scraped the ground as he moved. The kids had one dagger each hanging from their belts. Nex, however, had gone all out. She had a

sword strapped to her back and eight daggers hanging from her belt. It almost looked like she was wearing a skirt made of daggers.

I heard loud crying in the background. I looked out to the far side of camp to see the red-haired child crying and Bob freaking out, unsure of what to do.

I waved, and she came running to me cradling her arm.

When she got to me she began firing off unintelligible words between sobs. From what I had gathered, she had accidentally cut herself on one of Bob's horns trying to climb him.

I used Fleshcrafting and healed her injury. She didn't seem to feel any pain. I wondered again, was it because she was a flesh construct I had made, or was it because she had already been through so much pain?

Her crying gradually stopped as I mussed her hair. She smiled up at me and ran back to the other young ones to continue playing as Bob shot me a grateful look and mouthed, "Thank you."

I marveled again at how they were now able to laugh, play, and act like any other girls of their age.

I will definitely find that bastard.

I felt my pulling sensation from the goblin village grow strong. It was now more than just letting me know it was there. It was demanding that I follow it.

I looked back on what I had seen when I arrived. They were packing up camp. Thads had said they were vulnerable because they were moving camps. It had been a night and half a day since then. Just how far away was the goblin village?

After what had happened here, and what Leera and Lina's child had said before he departed, I knew that it was something dire. I knew that he was reaching out to me. Praying to *me*.

"Nex! How far away is your village from here?" I said with urgency.

She seemed startled by my sudden outburst. She came running over to me. "What's wrong, my love?" she asked in a concerned voice.

"I think something terrible is happening in your village."

"It will take me a few moments to get my bearings, but it is to the west of here. Wait here, I will talk to Dad and find a good path to take to avoid trouble," she answered as she ran off to her father.

I needed these Oni *stat*.

"Mors, teach them English."

I dragged the general's soul onto the red one and the sympathizer's soul onto the blue one.

As they opened their eyes, I said, "Welcome to your new lives. You have done terrible things in your old ones, but I saw promise in your souls and will call upon you to make amends by serving me. I also promise you that we will find and kill the one responsible for your original deaths. Swear your allegiance on your honor!"

They both clumsily sat up and immediately got to one knee. "We swear to serve you on our honor!" they responded with resolve.

"Look around for what you can salvage for weapons and clothes. We depart in the next hour."

"Bob!" I yelled.

Bob gently took the girl off his back and a second later he was in front of me.

"Yeah, Boss?"

"Take these girls to their villages. Take Roscia to our cave, then make haste to the goblin village."

"Sure thing, Boss! By the way, I have no clue where the goblin village is."

"It's to the west of here and to the north of our cave. Get a move on!"

Bob was gone in a flash, appearing again by the girls at the far side of camp. He talked to them for a minute and Roscia came running to me.

"Let me go with you!" she demanded.

"I have a feeling this will be tough. Though you are stronger than a normal person, you will only get in my way here. Don't worry, I'm not making you go home, instead you will go to my cave with my mates. They will protect you." I said while stroking her hair.

She made a pouty face but seemed to accept it. She walked with her shoulders slumped back over to Bob.

"I'm absolutely going with you." I heard a voice say right beside me.

I turned to see the elven woman.

"I'll tell you like I told her, this isn't going to be a fun adventure. This will likely be stopping a one-sided slaughter. I can't promise to protect you, but regardless of your wishes I will feel obligated to do so. You will be in the way!"

In response she moved her hands in front of her and began chanting in an unknown language similar in sound to Forestkin. I saw what can only be described as an icicle the size of a log form above her. She moved her hands forward forcefully as it tore off towards a nearby cropping of trees. I heard the ice explode as it hit, demolishing the trees and sending sharp pieces of ice and wood in all directions.

She then knelt down by a severed leg and touched it. She closed her eyes and seemed to be concentrating. The leg changed shape gradually. The skin and muscle fell off as it became a staff. She focused as strange symbols formed on the bone.

She examined her work and stood, wiping the sweat from her brow.

"Do you still think of me as weak?" she said as her bone staff began glowing a pale blue.

In just this amount of time had she actually learned Fleshcrafting? Sure, it was rough and sloppy with bits of muscle and tendon hanging off, but she actually did it, despite not being a flesh golem. Is it because she is

technically a flesh construct? Not to mention that massive icicle she threw. Just what had happened here?

"Um, hmm. You have a point here. That was quite impressive, but how many of those can you make? How long will you last in an extended battle?" I asked.

I really didn't want to take her into a messy fight after she had already been through so much. Just as I had told her, I would feel obligated to protect her. It would tether me to her and hold me back.

She shot a cocky smirk at me before holding her new staff in front of her. She began chanting again and I saw two log sized icicles form above her.

She shot them one after the other into the same group of trees. Each time one would detonate, she had another one forming.

She did this for a couple of minutes before shooting off both of them at the same time.

"After you brought me back, I could feel my mana building constantly. I should have no problems fighting a battle. With a better staff I could even fight a war," she said with confidence.

I took the piece of ember from my harness. I wasn't about to use it to bind anything against its will, but I had a great idea. I used Fleshcrafting on her staff to surround the amber in a cage of bone. I bound the wendigo soul into it. This way the wendigo would still be used as mana. I also took this opportunity to clean up the staff and fuse the bones together correctly for her, making it smooth and around five feet tall, just a foot shorter than her.

She added two more symbols to her staff then marveled at it.

The wendigo was an amalgamation of several souls. I knew it had a significant amount of power.

Green soul flames now shot out of the top of her staff. She began her chanting again, mixing her bright blue magic with the green of the wendigo's soul, producing a light teal

flame. Seven icicles the size of logs formed, then she willed them to merge into one giant one. She shot it off into the forest. It split through trees and earth alike, burying itself into a faraway hill before detonating. It began to snow all around us.

Bob and the girls had been watching for a while now. The girls were marveling at the snow falling around them. I walked in the direction of the icicle, examining its path of destruction. It looked like she actually killed a small group of deer, or were they antelope? I dragged the bodies back over to the parts pile; they may be useful.

After examining everything, I couldn't argue with results like these, even if I wanted to. There was, however, one glaring imperfection. She was basically a glass cannon. Her offensive potential was massive, but she had to remain stationary while she chanted and concentrated.

Maybe this could work if she was at least as fast as Bob, then she could fire from a good position and move before they could react. She could also put distance between her and would-be attackers, thereby voiding the chances of a direct fight. I had much to consider before agreeing to take her with me.

"If I were to take you, I would like to ease my mind first. What is your actual age?" I said as I marveled at the falling snow.

"I stopped counting at twenty," she replied with a smirk before continuing. "That was probably twenty years ago."

Does this mean that she is actually older than me? I suddenly had a different opinion about her. She wasn't a girl, she was a woman.

"What is your name?"

"Evangelina, but you may call me Lina."

"No! Just no! I will call you Eva." I said with unrestrained frustration.

There was only one Lina, and I had thought I was being original when I named her.

"I don't like Eva, it reminds me of someone I despise. How about my middle name Lireathia, Lirea for short," she replied.

"What the hell is wrong with you? No, are you just messing with me? That's too similar someone I love."

She seemed to be taken aback by this. "Okay..," she hesitated for a moment before continuing, "My last name is Nexializ."

I cut her off. "No! You are definitely trying to get a rise out of me now!" I stuck my fingers in my ears and started humming.

"Liz for short!" she yelled.

I took my fingers out of my ears. "Oh, okay. I can agree to that." I said as I breathed out in relief.

She smiled brightly at me, again tucking her hair behind her ears.

"That's quite a name you have there. Evangelina Lireathia Nexializ, is it your family name?" I asked.

"No, my mother abandoned me when I was a baby. The Roserethian orphanage took me in because of my ears. The followers of Rosereth hold elves in high regard. My name in fact comes from one of the early gospels. They were closed down when I was twelve and I had to leave." Her eyes seemed to be searching the ground.

"How did you come to learn magic?" I asked, trying to change the subject to something less depressing.

I was curious about how I could maybe acquire a few spells without killing people, or at the very least get Leera some much-needed tutelage.

"I have a high affinity for water magic. When they saw me manifesting small droplets of water they gave me a book to study. When my efforts didn't yield any results they took it back." She seemed to be getting gradually more depressed.

Well, that had the opposite effect. Unfortunately for her I had no time to waste. I needed to know her motivations.

"Why is it that you want to come with me, even though I warned you about the danger?" I asked.

She seemed to hesitate for a moment, still looking at the ground.

"If you come I won't coddle or protect you; you will find yourself in the midst of people that only want you dead," I told her blatantly.

She raised her head to look me in the eyes before responding. "I've lived with that for half my life! I couldn't even get a job to earn coin for food. I had to steal and scavenge. I was eating scraps from the trash before I took the Duke's son's offer." Her face had turned red in anger as she continued to speak. "You gave me life once more! You gave me back everything they had taken from me, and asked nothing for it. You gave me the power I always wanted, and now you reject me!" I could see tears starting to form in her eyes as her face contorted in sadness.

After a few moments of silence she spoke again. "I have nowhere else to go. I have nothing else to do. When I showed you my ears you smiled genuinely; you seemed happy. You even touched them. You took joy in something that I have been condemned for my whole life, and now you're pushing me away. You're basically telling me to, what, just go back to starving in the streets? To hateful glares and snide comments? I was even raped and beaten, and no one did anything about it. Until you — you even made me a maiden again." Tears were streaking down her face as she glared at me.

"I noticed it when you were in the tent. I noticed your other gift, too." She dropped her pants and raised her shirt showing me her thighs. Blood was dripping down her legs.

"You knew! It was like you knew what I had been through. You made me this way to protect me! But you didn't take me. You fought against your satyr side and resisted." She pulled her pants back up.

"Do you even know why there aren't that many satyrs anymore? They were known to go berserk when a woman was present and violate them. They were hunted to the very brink of their existence, and you still didn't lay a hand on me, not on any of us. Not until someone was willing. Just what the void are you? That's not how things work here." She wept quietly, her fists held tightly to her staff as she shook in rage.

"You even gave me this." She held up her staff. "A modern warmage with top-of-the-line military gear could only manage three normal-sized ice spears at best. I can now make seven giant ones, and you did it as if on a whim." She drove her staff into the ground and started to walk away, now audibly crying.

I rushed up to her, hugging her from behind. I rested my head on her shoulder and spoke quietly into her ear. "I wasn't trying to hurt you, and I wasn't rejecting you. I just didn't want you to get hurt. I didn't save you just to have you die again hours later."

Her hands reached up to mine as she hugged my arms.

I spoke again. "If you want to come with me I won't stop you, but I'm not a hero. In all likelihood I will be the end of this world someday. Coming with me is the same as throwing away your humanity."

Her body stiffened as my breath touched her ears. I used Fleshcrafting to mend her wounds and she shuddered.

"I've seen enough of humanity."

I felt her tears falling on my arms. I looked around and saw the girls watching our spectacle. She released my arms and turned around. She kissed me briefly before bringing her mouth to my ear I felt her hot breath as she spoke. "I don't care what you turn me into. I could be an ogre or a hellhound as long as I can stay with you, it will be worth it." I felt her pressing her bony body into mine.

She hugged me for several seconds as I ran my hands along her protruding spine. I could feel each vertebrae

prominently. I wondered about just what kind of life she could have led. I felt my heart grow heavy. No wonder she was mad at me. I had basically shown her a world of possibility, then told her to go back to dying slowly of hunger in some gutter somewhere.

I looked at the other girls. Some of them had sad expressions, and some looked confused.

"If any of you don't wish to return home, just tell Bob and you can live with me. I don't expect anything in return and you can return home at any time." I didn't want to force them into a fate they didn't want. Nor did I want them to feel obligated to me.

They seemed to understand.

"All right, Bob, it's time. Get them out of here."

Bob laid down and the girls mounted him, and before I knew it they were gone.

"Are you going to mark her?" Nex said from beside me.

I could feel Liz's skin heating up through my cheek.

"Not yet." I replied teasingly.

Liz pulled back from me suddenly. She bit her lower lip as she looked me in the eyes briefly before averting her gaze. I just smiled at her. She attempted to break our embrace, but I held her tight. After saying all that did she really expect me to allow her to get away?

She buried her head in my shoulder. I kissed all along her neck up her jawline until I was nibbling on her ear. I heard her make a cute whimper.

"Are you ready to give up your humanity? As you are now, you're still too vulnerable. I will improve and modify you as I see fit. I will remake you again and again until I am satisfied." I said in a whisper.

She shuddered again, then nodded.

"Take off your clothes, I can't do this otherwise." I commanded.

She separated from me and began undressing as the goblins watched. Her body was all skin and bones. She had

no breasts or butt to speak of; her legs were thin and long. There was a thick shock of blonde hair and a gap between her thighs that existed even when her legs were together. She looked around as if feeling self-conscious. This would be the first time I undertook so much on someone who was conscious and aware.

I told her to lie down. She complied while still covering herself. I placed a hand over her eyes, giving her the Life Sense ability. I ran my hands along her ribs. I could feel each one under my fingers as I moved slowly along her skin. She opened her eyes, watching me as my hands came to rest beneath her breasts. I granted her the wendigo's fog capabilities. She inhaled suddenly, exhaling fog as she breathed out.

Even though the twins showed obvious interest, there was no way I could bring myself to mate with her yet. When I looked at her body all I could see was a life of sadness. She even had frown lines that I hadn't noticed before. I was worried that she was doing this out of desperation to stay with me, or obligation for saving her. It just didn't feel right to make a move on her right now. I would let her stay with me. I would see her fattened up and happy, smiling a natural smile. Only then would I take her as a mate. To stay with me, however she needed strength.

I thought about how to make her faster. I remembered the deer she had killed during her demonstration. After what I had done with Bob, I remembered how the Sha'Dwarg's muscles worked. I should be able to duplicate it on a smaller scale as long as there were four legs.

If you duplicated the speed and strength with only two legs, you would basically make someone exceptionally good at hopping in random uncontrolled directions. If everything wasn't timed just so, they could end up leaping into the enemy or flinging themselves into the nearest tree. A front-heavy balance was required to maintain control, while the rear legs were for providing power.

I stood up and walked over to the deer carcasses. They were a bit shredded. I combined them all together while condensing and Blending them. I removed their heads as I layered the muscle on their back legs.

I dragged it back over by her.

"Lie on your side, please." I told her as I dropped the carcass.

She gave me a worried look before rolling over.

I placed the deer next to her as I melded her body from the waist down with it. I combined her long legs with the deer's front legs, giving them power but making them narrow down gradually to hooves. I had her keep her womanhood between her front legs. The deer still had functional lungs and a heart.

I gave its heart mana regeneration, which I would guess was at about 4 or 5 per hour. I opened up two holes on the sides of the deer similar to Bob's setup, allowing her to open and close them while also linking them to her normal lungs with a thick, flexible, two-way line. Using some of the other nearby bodies I reinforced the rear legs, giving them the qualities of both the monstrous bear and the Sha'Dwarg. I changed the deer's sex into human parts, as I was fairly certain she didn't wish to mate with animals. *I guess she's twice the woman now.*

"Mors, I'd like to give her a little more fat to even her out."

I felt her take control of my body as she began pulling and distributing fat until you could no longer count her ribs by sight.

"That's enough, Mors."

I didn't want her to think that I didn't find her attractive before. I would allow her to put on weight normally from here on out. I was just giving her a little headstart.

I looked down on my work.

I kept her deer half small but powerful. Maybe just four feet from her waist to her butt. I still wanted her to be

maneuverable around other people and in small places.

I looked at her front. Where her waist met deer, I had it trail off in a V-shape with the fur and muscle from the deer covering where her hips used to be. Her front entrance and anus now faced forward, ending at the bottom of the V, as I knew there was no way she could cover herself if it was underneath.

Her deer half was a beautiful mix of light brown with black stripes and white spots. I debated running the deer's fur up her back but decided against it as it would make wearing clothes itchy.

I reached down to her ears. I grew the points back to the length the elves in my world had. I rimmed her ears in black fur with a white spot at the top similar to the deer's coloration.

The wendigo's capabilities had changed her eye color to a light brown. After debating for awhile, I decided to change the color to a frosty light teal color similar to the color of the flames on her staff when her blue magic met with the green of the soul flame. I used Blend and gave her fur mana-gathering properties.

I used Blend then stopped Fleshcrafting.

She had been watching me as best she could the entire time I was working and had remained silent. I reached my hand down and helped her to her hooves. She rose shakily as if unsure of how to stand. She leaned on me for support.

Now that she wasn't emaciated, I could plainly see she was a beauty. She noticed that I was looking her over, and her face began to redden slightly.

She wrapped her arms around my neck and pulled me close while breathing heavily. She gave me a long, lingering kiss before releasing me and standing on her own.

I gave her shirt back to her. I somehow doubted that pants would work for her anymore. The shirt was long enough to cover her front to just below her knees.

"Did you increase my mana again?" she asked in a sheepish voice.

"Yes, you now have two hearts — among other things." I replied while smirking.

She gave me a confused look. I walked behind her and gently ran a hand between her rear legs. She gasped as the realization of what I said hit her. Her legs buckled momentarily before she regained her balance.

She looked back at me in a half-glare, but her eyes showed something else entirely. Was it lust or curiosity?

She examined her body in fascination as she maneuvered herself around to face me. She reached her hands up to her ears and her eyes went wide.

"You actually made them more prominent!?" she said as she ran a finger along the fur. "I know you have strange tastes, but I didn't know they went this far. These have been a source of shame and ridicule my entire life, and you make them stand out more?" she stammered, seeming to be on the precipice of another tirade.

I moved forward and began stroking them between my fingers. Her face melted from one of shock to one of bliss as she lost herself in the feeling. I may also have subconsciously added several nerves to them. *Now that I think about it, all my mates have pointy ears. I guess I do have a type.*

"They aren't that bad, are they?" I asked.

A slight moan was all I got in reply. As I started to move my hands away she grabbed my wrists and moved my hands back to her ears. I continued rubbing her ears for some time before she regained herself.

"No one has ever touched them like that, and now you have done it twice in one day," she said finally breaking the silence.

"I liked them then, and I like them now." I replied as her grip relented and I got my hands back.

She looked at me warmly, a small smile slowly spreading across her face.

As much as I loved doting on her I needed to get a move on.

"You should try moving and running. The reason I have given you these legs is so that you can fire off a spell and change locations rapidly." I told her in an even tone.

She nodded and began trotting toward her staff.

I looked around. Nex and her father seemed to be drawing a map in the dirt. The oni had used collapsed tents and rope to make a sort of loincloth to cover their nethers. The blue one was busy tying together a series of logs, and the red one was swinging an uprooted tree around for practice.

I walked towards Nex and her father. I knelt down to examine their map. I saw several dots and lines.

"So, how's it going on finding a route?"

"The problem is avoiding the main road. It stands between us and our village. It was where they captured us before. They have a garrison of archers lining it there, and a fair amount of human traffic goes through regularly," the elder goblin said while pointing to a line that divided the map.

"What if we head southwest and cut past it after it turns towards the human village?" Nex asked while pointing to a huge curve in the road.

"We can't do that — two of our gobs never returned from that direction leaving." He made an exaggerated trilling noise. "An orphan," the older goblin said, shaking his head.

If I understood the way Bob and I had came correctly, then my cave wasn't far from where the road trailed off. *Oh, I think I have some explaining to do here.*

I told them about Leera and Lina and my first experience after stepping out of the cave. I also told them about their child coming to visit us and how he was now apparently my

disciple. I also told them my theory on the pulling sensation and our need for haste.

The old gent had a tear in his eye as he responded. "I see. It's good that they have found happiness."

Nex looked at me with pride, her eyes glowing as she leaned up to kiss me.

"You saved them, like you saved us," she said. "Even after they tried to kill you. We're all still here because of you. It might not seem like it, but we gobs are all family, and for a non-gob to treat us so kindly is unheard of."

Nex ran off, leaving me alone with the old gent. I couldn't just keep calling him that.

"Is it okay if I give you a name in my language?" I asked.

"To a gob, earning a name is an honor. However, names are usually only bestowed to family from a higher figure in the family. You have, however, taken my eldest daughter as your mate, so you are already in my family. Given what you have done for us, I will allow you this honor and appoint you the head of my clan," he said while bowing to me.

Damn, I had no idea goblins were this sophisticated; he almost sounded like a human noble. He was a gentleman and deserved a gentleman's name.

"I am honored to have your daughter as a mate, and as the head of our clan I name you Reginauld." I told him.

He nodded as he spoke. "That's a fine masculine name; within it I sense a certain respect, as well. I will gladly take it. Thank you, Chief."

Wait, chief? Was he the chief? Did that mean that I marked and bedded the chief's daughter? I guess that makes her one of the stronger females in her village.

Nex returned carrying a bundle of leather armor and boots. She placed them at my feet.

"I found these among the bodies; I'm pretty sure I know your size now," she said as she again eyed me provocatively.

I took off my harness and put on the leather armor. The arms of the chest piece wouldn't fit, so I had to rip them off. The leather greaves slid over my normal pants just fine and the boots fit. I placed my harness back on and reattached my weapon. I felt a little more protected now.

An idea sprang to my mind about making bone armor, but I didn't have time at the moment.

I looked around to see everyone's progress. The red oni now held a shield made of logs and a weapon made from a fallen tree. The blue oni was currently fashioning himself a shield in the same way; he seemed to be putting the finishing touches on it. Liz was darting through the trees at an astonishing pace, dodging between them with a determined look on her face.

I walked toward the tent to retrieve my bow and shield as Nex followed me. She looked disappointed that I was only going in the tent to get my weapons, yet still followed me out.

"You should make her your mate as well," she said seriously as she pointed to Liz. "She is strong, and you need many strong offspring to increase the power of the clan."

She was almost like a more straightforward Leera.

"I will, but she has been through a lot. I won't take her until I'm sure she is beyond it." I replied as we walked back toward Reginauld.

I peered down at the map. I felt one last surging pull as it stopped at the height of its urgency.

"We will go directly and take out the archers on our way." I said resolutely.

My time to prepare was up.

"Red, Blue, Liz, gather up, we need to go!" I yelled.

I felt the earth shake as my super-dense oni came sprinting over. Liz appeared in front of me almost instantly in a very Bob-like manner, her hair and shirt flapping in the breeze as she smiled at me.

After everyone had gathered together, I laid out our anti-archer strategy and went over their capabilities.

Reginauld informed me that Nex was perhaps the best archer in the village; he felt he may be more accurate, but she could fire more arrows at a target than he could.

The oni would act as shield walls and targets as Liz and Nex set about sniping them at opportune times.

It was agreed that Nex would ride on Liz's back and take out targets while Liz charged her spells. Reginauld and his children would stay behind the oni and take shots of opportunity while I focused on directing everyone and controlling the battlefield with my spells. In the event of a melee, the goblins would climb the oni and cling to their shields, firing arrows when they were able.

The red oni told the blue one to quickly tie some rope together in a small net pattern around the inside of their shields so that the goblins could have a foothold they could wrap their legs into or cling to should things get rough. The blue oni ran off, returned with a length of rope, and hurriedly began tying knots.

I looked over to Reginauld and asked how far it was if we took the direct route. He informed me that it was less than half a day's walk from here. That made me wonder about a few things. Just how long would it take the bandits to notice that their reinforcements from this camp weren't coming, and just how long would it take them to start heading back? What if Thads had hopped off in that direction? Could we be running directly into a prepared ambush?

Chapter 30: Burden — Leera

As was typical of him, John left early yesterday without telling us much of anything. I had noticed that Bob was also gone.

I woke up yesterday cuddling who I thought was John, just to open my eyes and see the dryad. I was surprised at first, but I felt something hot on my stomach which distracted me.

I looked down to see Lina. I moved her up my body to my chest and whispered her name a few times. She didn't respond.

I placed my hand on her head. She was burning up! I observed her for a few minutes. She was taking fast, heavy breaths.

I sat up and gently cradled her in my arms. Her face was squished up in a labored expression. I breathed my healing mist over her, and she seemed to calm down a bit.

This was bad. Where the hell is John?

After looking around, I knew he had left. Luckily Bob had left us most of a bear to eat, even though it did smell a little strange.

I dragged it inside and began taking it apart. I held a piece of it up to Lina's mouth, but she didn't wake.

The dryad sat up and began smacking her lips. She scratched her armpit and then smelled her hand. When she noticed me watching she seemed to blush. She looked around the cave in a panic, then got to her feet and began running around as if frantically searching for something.

She ran up to me speaking gibberish in an exasperated tone while making overly exaggerated hand movements. All I could make out of that mess was "Gone."

I just shook my head. She screamed and ran out of the cave.

Why exactly did John bring her home? He said that he didn't want to mate with her and that she had even tried to kill him. It didn't make any sense to me.

I rocked back and forth, still cradling Lina in my arms. Her body felt like it was on fire.

The dryad came running back in and started babbling while shaking my shoulders.

"I can't understand you!" I said while trying to enunciate as much as possible.

She sat down and held her chin as if thinking before she tried to speak. "He... where?" she asked nervously.

"He, gone." I answered.

She started pulling her hair while mumbling to herself.

I looked down to Lina, who was now wrapped in her wings with sweat pouring down her face.

I had no idea what I could do for her, but she was worrying me. I loved her; there was no way I could ever stomach the idea of losing her. The fact that she was suffering was more than I could bear.

I breathed some freezing fog on her. I thought it might help bring down her temperature.

She began shivering, but she didn't open her eyes.

The dryad came over and placed a hand on her forehead before looking me in the eye and again running out of the cave.

There really must be something wrong with that lady.

I continued to breathe my healing fog over Lina, as it seemed like the only thing that brought her comfort.

The rest of the day passed by quickly with Lina only waking once or twice, and then only taking a bite or two of food.

I fell asleep with her in my arms. She was an irreplaceable person to me; I desperately wanted her to feel better.

I awoke again in the morning with the dryad cuddling Lina and myself. Why couldn't she take a hint? I had no love

for her, and the only reason I even tolerated her presence was because John brought her in.

As I sat up, her arm hit the ground and my hand slipped. I landed back on her arm with a weird crunch. I think I may have accidentally broken her elbow. She rose up screaming with tears in her eyes. I breathed my healing fog on her, and her wailing stopped.

She smiled at me and flexed her arm before running over to a pile of plants she had gathered. She began shoveling the plants into her mouth. I guessed that she was an herbivore. She hurried back over to me and looked down at Lina while still chewing.

"I... fix," she said with her mouth full while gesturing at Lina.

I looked at her questioningly as she pressed her lips to Lina's mouth. She moved her hand up, rubbing Lina's throat as she kissed her.

Lina's heat seemed to normalize as the dryad fed her something.

"She... unlock... infernal," she said before continuing her gibberish.

"She what!?" I asked while staring at the dryad.

She paused her unintelligible monologue and responded in a mix of bad English and goblin. "She... magic... Trapped inside."

Lina opened her bright green eyes and looked at me.

"Lina! Lina, my sweet, you need to use some of your fog, not the paralyzing kind, but just blow some out. It may help you feel better." I said while stroking her hair.

I helped her sit up and she exhaled.

It was hot, really hot! I used self-heal on myself, as I could feel the skin on my arms burning. It was like she was exhaling superheated steam.

The dryad screamed, as she was accidentally in the path of it, and ran across the room clutching her face.

Lina stopped exhaling and started taking even breaths. Her body felt a little cooler now. She stood up and walked towards the exit of the cave and flashed me an apologetic expression.

She began breathing out steam once more. I watched as her steam gradually changed forms, becoming more like smoke. The smoke thickened and began to take on a human shape — a familiar shape. It was eerily similar to John. The smoke man leaned down and hugged her. As they embraced, the smoke man picked her up in its arms as two amber orbs formed in its head resembling John's eyes when he used Life Sense.

The smoke man carried her over and sat her down by me before dispersing into the air. Lina sighed.

"I miss him," she said sadly.

"Don't worry, we'll see him again soon!" I said to try to comfort her.

I walked over to the cowering dryad and breathed a thick gout of my healing mist. The blisters on her face disappeared, and she sighed a breath of relief before energetically hugging me. She really needs some clothes. It's not like I'm opposed to her sexually, but she isn't in our family, and she really needs to calm down. It's like she's never really interacted with anyone before and has no filter on her actions. She's manic and selfish. I can understand why John didn't want her, but maybe I can do something about that. Help her grow up a little.

Not now, but in time I might be able to turn her around and let her see that reality is about more than her. Could that be why John brought her to me? She did help Lina, and I'm grateful to her for that. If she wasn't here I'm not sure what I would have done.

I hugged her back. She was a little more than a foot taller than me and my head rested between her breasts as she hugged me in close and sighed a happy sigh on my shoulder.

I think she is afraid of being alone, of rejection. It's like she needs to be close to someone. I more than most can understand that after all those years I spent in isolation.

Dryads had never appeared for me before, but I knew about their existence from the stories I had heard here and there in my travels. They are almost always bound to a tree, but somehow John had severed her link. Maybe that was the cause of her current behavior. It must be hard for someone who was always part of something bigger to suddenly be alone. I think that's why she was so inseparable from John that first night.

I pushed her back from me despite her protests. She really was weak compared to Lina, John, or myself. John had made our muscles strong, but I'm guessing he had left her as she was.

My mother once told me a scary story. It was about how paradise falcons were often captured and kept as pets. She told me they would sew our eyes shut and make us depend on them for everything in order to train us to be subservient to them.

I doubt that was John's intention, but maybe I could use that here to help her.

I reached out and grabbed the sides of her head. She tried to pull away as a look of fear spread across her face. I pulled her in and kissed her. She seemed to protest for a few seconds before relaxing and accepting it. I could still taste the herbs in her mouth as my tongue played with hers.

I released her and she lingered for a few moments as we continued to kiss.

I finally broke it off and moved my head away while searching her face for a reaction. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyebrows were knit as if unsure what to do.

I reached my small arms around her and held her body close to mine again. I could hear her heart beating through her chest as I lay my ear on it. I released her and moved away as she hugged herself and sat down.

Yes, I was sure of it now. She could be changed. She longed for someone the same way I had before I met John.

I threw off my furs.

I pushed her down to the ground and pinned her hands above her head. I used my knees to spread her legs apart as her weak muscles tried in vain to fight me. I lay myself on top of her, pressing my pelvis against hers as I began to kiss her again.

I used my tongue to probe her mouth and hers met mine, intertwining and caressing. Her face flushed red against the soft green of her skin as I moved my mouth lower, kissing along her neck until I reached her over-sized breasts.

I released her hands and began sucking her nipple as I squeezed them. She went to move her hands but I slammed them back down above her head before continuing to make my way down her body.

I licked and played with her belly button as she let out a soft chuckle. I ran my fingers lightly down her sides and she shivered, her skin forming goosebumps. I pulled my hair back as I licked down her inner thigh reaching her sopping entrance. I felt her jerk in surprise as my tongue met her clit. I inserted a finger into her as I sucked and teased her.

Her legs gripped around me and she stiffened. I could feel her twitching around my fingers as I began to move them faster inside of her. I could tell she was getting close. I pulled my fingers out and slowly inserted them into her ass. She writhed as if trying to get away but I held her in place as my tongue continued to work on her.

She moaned and cried out as her first orgasm overtook her then she lay there just breathing. I sat up and pulled her to her knees.

She looked up at me with a confused expression. Her face was flushed and her pupils were dilated. I stood in front of her and forced her face between my legs. "Do to me, what I just did to you!" I ordered as the dryad began to lick me.

I saw Lina giving me a 'what the hell?' look out of the corner of my eye. I wasn't fond of the dryad, but I could recognize that she was a person we needed. A person John needed in order to secure a good future for our flock.

With her personality, she needed to be taught humility, she needed someone to watch over her and she needed a leader to keep her from self destructing. I would begin immediately.

In time, she may become part of our flock.

Chapter 31: Crusade

I had been in Theross for only a few days and I had already amassed a large group of followers. Commoners came by the droves, seeking glory and fearing condemnation.

Knights, guardsmen, and even third sons of nobles joined me. The nobles proper would not meet with me out of fear that they may be compelled by the sigil to join my cause.

"I've brought a large number of clergy, my champion!" Barneth said to me as he bowed humbly.

I never thought I would see the day when a high priest bowed to a paladin. I felt truly blessed as I reveled in the glory of Therossa.

As it stood, I had a large number of supporters, but they were not fighters. They would die in glory, but I feared the dark god may be tied to necromancy as all dark things are.

I couldn't risk having these honorable souls charging to their deaths only to be resurrected to kill their brethren. I would not fight a war of attrition. I would fight one of overwhelming force and certain victory.

I would need the knights and the nobles to train them in our sacred art of divine swordsmanship. I would induct them all as honorary paladins and have them go through the basic physical training at the very least. I would need to take some time to get them combat-ready — time that Therossa had not given me, but I saw no way around it.

In the meantime, I would take a trip to the outlying camps, the slums, and the poor quarter. It would be a good opportunity to rid this kingdom of crime and the fetid poor who bring it with them. The beggars, the drunkards, the physically incapable, the injured, and the ill, they are like leeches to this glorious kingdom. I will use my sigil on each and every one I find, sending all that don't agree to the

plains of suffering. I'll spit on their souls. These fools are a blight lacking the will to kill themselves to spare the kingdom of their weakness.

I had fought against the Garanthians in the last war, and quite a bit of that had rubbed off on me. They may have been savages, but their capital was spotless and grand.

Now that I had the power, I would not let it go to waste. I had even heard tales of a slaver's market in the slums. The slaves would not be affected by my sigil as they were not followers of Therossa, but the masters surely would be. I would free them and add their number to my crusade. Their evil deeds would feed my good cause.

I have no idea what this dark god may amass, but it will pale in comparison to my forces when we meet. I will see to that.

Barneth seemed to be beaming as he looked out at our camp outside of the capital. He had suggested that we also visit the orphanages and conscript the children. I hadn't seen any value in that until he explained that they could all be taught the art of divine healing by his own hand.

That was truly a great honor. Usually training by the high priest was reserved for nobility, but he explained to me that these were turbulent times and we must take in every person who could be of service in our upcoming battle.

Things were definitely coming together nicely. Though I knew it was wrong of me, I felt excited. I would soon lead the largest army this continent had seen in the past thousand years.

By the end of this, I may even be a king.

Chapter 32: Forest Run — John

We rushed through the forest heading toward the goblin camp. It became quickly apparent that I was falling behind fast, though. The oni took long strides that ate up the distance, while Liz darted quickly between trees at an amazing speed, having to stop and wait every now and then for everyone else to catch up.

I felt like an anchor that was dragging everyone else down.

"Liz, I have an awkward request." I said as I caught up with her.

She stopped and eyed me suspiciously.

"Would you let me ride you?" I asked awkwardly between breaths.

Her thin lips curled into a mocking smile as I caught up with her.

"Can you what?" she said teasingly with a hint of a blush.

Oh no, I had been down this road once already. As much fun as it would be to tease Liz here, Nex had a determined expression. I could tell she was worried about her village.

"My dear lady, I would humbly like to ask permission to sit atop your back as you run." I said as formally as I could.

Liz's smile faded into a timid expression as her brows knitted together and she fidgeted with her staff.

"No one has ever been this polite to me before; I'm not sure how to react," she said somberly.

She averted her eyes from me and seemed to be deep in thought.

I hope I didn't trigger any bad memories. I wasn't trying to make her sad, and we needed to get going again. I looked at her body. She was roughly the same height as me, maybe a little taller. Her deer half was only slightly above my

waistline. If I rode on her back I would have to pull my feet up to avoid hitting the ground every other step.

She nervously turned her rear towards me. "Get on, I trust you," she said as she covered her lady parts with her tail.

"Thank you, milady." I said as I did an awkward little hop to throw my leg around her back. That's the first time I ever called a woman milady and she didn't scoff.

I moved up to the front and pressed up behind Nex. I reached my arms forward and grabbed Liz's waist to steady myself while locking Nex between us.

I heard her take in a long breath as if to ready herself and we were off.

With me on her back, her speed dropped substantially; we were now running just faster than the oni.

I told her to drop back to the rear, as I could see the trees thinning out. It was better to let the oni take point from here.

They stood out like sore thumbs in this forest, while she could Blend in. *She may have to worry about hunters at some point*, I thought.

We continued until we were at the treeline. I called a stop when the road was at the edge of my vision.

I inhaled deeply, trying to sniff out any men who might be hiding. The wind was not in my favor, and I could only smell traces of their presence. Which means either they are here or they've been here, but it doesn't provide me with an idea of where they may be.

I activated Life Sense. I saw several small blobs in the distance, but it was too far to make out what they could be.

I dismounted Liz and looked up to the trees. *Strange there aren't any birds around here; maybe we made too much of a ruckus. If that's the case, then any enemies around may also be aware of our presence.*

I searched the ground around me. I saw one of those bushy-tailed mice that Bob and Lina used to eat peeking out

of the hollow of a nearby tree.

I walked slowly towards it. It eyed me for the briefest of moments, which was enough. I used coerce.

I thought about it coming over to me. It came running out of the tree toward me but stopped dead as a dagger protruded from its back.

I looked around startled, only to see Nex grinning. *Damnit, there goes my scout.*

I picked up the rodent and removed the dagger. I gave both to Nex and she devoured it hungrily, bones and all. Well, I guessed it wasn't a total loss. She must have thought I was hunting.

As I looked around, I didn't see anything else I could use. *It looks like we're going to have to go in blind.*

I started going over our basic strategy. I was going to order the two oni out into the open with their makeshift shields raised. Then I was going to have Liz and Nex flank them from the right while I flanked them from the left rear.

"My Lord." The red oni spoke in a chilling voice, interrupting my train of thought. "We may be able to do more. If we plant our shields into the ground once we're close, the goblins will still have a defended position and we will be able to move out into the open as shock troops penetrating their lines and getting behind them. Doing it this way will give you and Liz, I believe you call her, a better chance to flank, while the goblins can take the time they need to take better aim."

I had forgotten that he had military strategy at such a high level. I would need to consult him more often.

"Don't forget about your fog and Life Sense abilities. The fog should cover me and Liz as we get into position." I said to remind everybody.

As we were speaking I heard a loud crackling noise. I turned around to see a massive glacier hovering in the air. Before I could say anything it shot off towards the faraway

road, hitting with the force of an explosion. Chunks of ice and dirt rained down on us as a cold wind blew past.

I looked at Liz, who had a deranged smile on her face that was distorting her ladylike features as she cackled like a maniac.

I had failed to realize just how much resentment she must still have. I looked back to the crop of trees by the road. They were gone, as well as a good portion of the road itself.

"Charge!" I yelled.

We needed to take advantage of this situation. If there were any survivors, I had no doubt they would be stunned and confused.

As we approached the road, all we found was an icy crater. There were no enemies here. This seemed to back up my fears from earlier. Thads had probably come this way and taken his archers to another location.

Liz trotted up next to me, admiring her work. Her face turned sour as she realized that there were no victims from her attack.

"How badly did that deplete your mana?" I asked, as I was worried that she may be defenseless in the battles to come.

"With all the regen and capacity I have now, I should be able to make two more of those glaciers, several logs, and hundreds of spears," she answered with confidence.

Liz was no longer a glass cannon — she was now a weapon of mass destruction. I was worried that I had corrupted her with power. I may need to change her back to her demi-human form if this continued, but I couldn't argue with the results.

I faced her and pulled her into a hug. "Good job, my deer, but next time please consult me first." I whispered into her ear.

I noticed immediately that her ears reddened as I released her. She just shyly nodded at me in confirmation.

I mounted her again as we continued our trek to the goblin village. We traveled at a slightly slower pace to prevent the oni from crashing into trees and generally making noise.

As we made our way through the forest I heard an almost imperceptible laugh in the distance. Liz and Nex seemed to notice it as well, as they turned their heads toward it.

I called another stop while I focused on listening for any other signs of life.

The oni hunkered down to one knee, catching their breath as I once again dismounted Liz.

I focused on my hearing, trying to confirm what I had heard. The sound of cheerful voices and rowdy laughter wafted over to me. I wasn't sure who it was, but I knew who to expect.

"Get ready, they seem to be coming this way! Liz, make yourself scarce, and use ice spears. I don't want friendly fire here." I said in a hushed voice.

Liz and Nex disappeared in an instant as the oni stood up.

I decided that I would be the vanguard. I didn't want innocent blood on my hands if I could help it and needed to confirm that they were the enemy. If they were anything like the ones at camp, they wouldn't try to kill me outright and would instead try to lure me to their friends for an easy kill. My spells would be able to control them as I called reinforcements should they try to kill me themselves.

I opted to set an ambush. I told the oni to remain in place and be highly visible. At the point that they could visually confirm the enemy, they should make a loud noise to alert them of their presence. I would use that moment to slip behind them and bind them in place with Tendrils and Weakness. The oni nodded and I moved off toward the voices.

As I crept nearer I could make out more of what they were saying.

"Therossa, I love killing goblins!"

"I know, they always scream the loudest."

"I kind of feel bad for that little one, though; it jumped at me screaming something about its god punishing us."

"Since when do goblins even have gods?"

"It's probably just made of poo like everything else in that village."

They all laughed again, like it was just some sort of comedy they had watched and not a genocide. I felt my rage bubbling up from inside me again. Had they been talking about Leera and Lina's child? Had they murdered my only living disciple?

"Just what was that spiky thing that poked out of his arm? Are they evolving?"

"It doesn't make much difference now. Do you remember how much he squealed as I shoved my sword into his back?"

"Yeah, you pinned him to the ground. He kept trying to crawl, it was like he didn't know he was stuck."

"Yeah, it took him a long time to die. I had to kick him until his face caved in."

They all laughed again while describing his bloody death. He was an innocent, in a way my step-child. I'd had enough of their banter. These were definitely enemies, and they needed to die in the worst way.

I stepped out into their path. My fists were shaking and I could feel a sense of malevolent fury pulsing from me. I didn't think I could go along with my own plan anymore. I tried to use the calming effect, but it only took the edge off.

There were six of them: two archers and four men armed with swords and daggers. This was likely just the group responsible for notifying the camp of their success.

They noticed me instantly. The archers started to take out their bows as the man in front shouted, "Just who..." I didn't let him finish.

I leapt forward and smoothly drew my weapon. I swung it into his side. I felt his body buckle under the impact as it

bent almost in half. He went flying off into the trees as I heard a revolting crunch in the distance.

The archers had their bows ready as the other two men fumbled with their swords in a panic.

I dropped my weapon and dove at the archers. My bone spikes hit them each in the chest. I held them aloft, letting their blood slide down my arms as they squealed and kicked in the air. I withdrew my spikes and allowed them to die at my feet.

I heard a scream as one of the men crashed to the ground trying to scramble away from me.

The other one had drawn his sword but seemed unsure of what to do with it. I parried with my left spike as he took a wild swing at me. I grabbed his sword hand and crushed it at his wrist. As he screamed, I flung him to the ground on top of his friend. I picked up his fallen sword and skewered them both, driving the sword deep into the ground and pinning them in place.

I retrieved my macuahuitl as they struggled and squirmed. I chopped into the one on top using the minimum force while being careful not to hit his spine. I felt it bite deep into his leather armor. I wanted him to feel everything; I needed to see his suffering. It would be like a cold drink of water in the hot desert.

I began sawing slowly, and he shrieked as he tried to crawl away from the sword in his lower back. Unfortunately for him and the one underneath, I had driven it in vertically. If he wanted to be free he would have to split himself from his stomach through his crotch. I felt blood splatter my face as I hit an artery. It continued to gush, painting the ground around us in red and practically drowning the man below him.

Soon the screaming turned into gurgling, and then only the horrified wailing from the one underneath remained.

The macuahuitl finally broke through the one on top as he sloughed off in two pieces, leaving only the one at the

bottom.

"Did he scream as loud as that when you killed him?" I asked the one on the bottom as a look of horror slowly turned to a look of thought.

"You! Are you their god?" he stammered through gasping breaths.

"I am his god, and I will devour you all. This is only the beginning to your torture. Would you like a preview?" I yelled as spittle shot from my mouth.

I used petrifying gaze.

He contorted in abject agony. His body seemed to withdraw into itself as his hands curled up so tightly I could almost hear the tendons snap. His mouth opened to supernatural levels and his eyes cried blood as they bulged from their sockets.

I began sawing. I felt it tearing into him as he spasmed under me. He didn't release so much as a scream as I finished bisecting him. My body and my macuahuitl were now dripping wet with their thick blood. I licked my lips, savoring the taste.

I panted uncontrollably. This wasn't near enough. Not only had they likely raped those girls, they had also tortured someone who had believed with all his heart that I would save him. Someone precious to my girls, the last remnant of their former lives.

Each would be a torch soon.

I finally regained myself. I looked around for further threats. I guess I hadn't realized when they got here, but I was surrounded.

Luckily it was my own group.

The oni stared at me with terrified gazes as from the tops of their shields the goblins looked on in amazement. Liz looked at me with her manic smile plastered on her face, and Nex seemed aroused, her eyes glancing over my blood-slicked skin appreciatively. It was time to move on.

I withdrew the sword from the red mud with a wet sucking noise and set about gathering their bodies.

I used Soul Steal and took their skills. It wasn't enough to level up anything. Thads had likely kept his strongest men around himself and sent the weaklings off to fight the goblins.

I began decapitating them.

I infused each of their souls back into their heads. I looked to the sky and used Soul Steal again. As their lamenting cries rang out in inescapable torment, I felt my lips curling into a full grin.

I felt the cold embrace of the elder god once more. There seemed to be something in it, a warm feeling similar to a proud motherly hug. It seemed so familiar, like I had felt it before I came to this world. I must learn more about it.

I canceled Soul Steal and mounted three heads each on the tops of the oni's shields. They would definitely draw all the attention now.

I knew the oni had strong defenses, as I had seen them topple several medium-sized trees with their bodies without flinching, but I needed them at full power. I wanted them to be able to regenerate. To do that they needed to eat, and as it turned out I had no further use for these bodies.

I ordered them to eat. They looked at each other nervously. I could see the conflict in their eyes. They didn't want to eat humans, but they also didn't want to disobey.

The red one was the first to try. He started taking timid bites that gradually turned into frenzied gluttony. Yeah, the hybrid stomachs probably automatically gave them the Feast ability. The blue one joined in after seeing the look of satisfaction on the red one's face, and soon there was nothing left.

This way their bellies would be full and they would have the fuel to regenerate later — though I felt like they needed a bib, as it looked like they both had taken first place in a cherry pie-eating contest.

I mounted Liz and our group proceeded onward.

The mood was a little strange, and no one said anything. Nex was purposely pressing her butt against my crotch as we rode, but now wasn't the time for this. She hiked up her long shirt and I was reminded that she didn't have anything on underneath.

We did still have a few hours until we reached the goblin village. Maybe she was doing this to take her mind off things. Perhaps she thought we might die in the battle to come and wished to mate one last time.

Chapter 33: Risky Ride - John

Nex had exposed herself below the waist and began reaching back with one hand to fiddle with the knot that kept my pants on while her other hand gripped Liz's shirt to keep her steady.

The twins had been ready after I had thought about Nex's naked ass pressing against me.

As she finally succeeded in untying my pants I shifted my hips to allow her to pull the waist down to bellow my balls, freeing the twins.

She waited until Liz had to jump over a log and used that opportunity to skewer herself onto me, making sure that both members found their way into both of her waiting holes as we landed with a jolt driving them in deep.

She bit her lip to avoid making a noise as Liz continued to run slightly behind the oni. She now had both hands gripping onto Liz's shirt as we went with the motion of Liz's running to time our thrusts.

I savored the feeling of being inside her as we rode. Her muscles once again started doing their milking motions. If other humans ever knew that goblin vaginas were capable of this, they may not hate them as much. Maybe this feeling was what Pervy Guy had died for. I could understand it now. I didn't need to thrust. Her muscles naturally moved in rhythmic motions as if their sole purpose was to suck every drop of seed out of me.

We rode that way for a while as my climax slowly built. I could see Nex panting, and I could practically feel her pulse from where we were connected.

Liz got a little too close to the oni for comfort as I saw Nex's father peek his head towards us.

Nex moved swiftly, covering with her shirt.

"We're only about an hour away" He yelled to inform us as I came hard into Nex.

Nex buried her face into Liz's back as I felt her contracting powerfully around me.

I was certain of it now, she had a cum fetish. Specifically a fertilization fetish, she loved the thought of being impregnated so much that it got her off.

"Good, let's slow our pace a little and check for signs of life." I yelled back at Reginauld, while still emptying myself into his daughter.

He turned back forward, seeming none the wiser. Liz however stiffened up, likely feeling the wet, warm sensation on her back.

I looked up at her head, expecting her to turn around at any minute and ask just what the hell was going on here, but other than an obvious reddening of her ears she didn't react.

Nex's muscles went into overdrive sucking my limp members with ferocity. I was hard again before I knew it and already feeling another climax coming.

I was high on this feeling as well as the thought that Liz knew what was happening, but didn't stop it.

Nex had a mouth full of Liz's shirt and had pulled it up, exposing Liz.

I reached my hand around Liz's waist gradually traveling lower towards her exposed sex. I heard a slight moan coming from her as I traced my fingers along her slit, spreading her lips.

I inserted my finger slowly up to the second knuckle and gradually began to finger her. She was sopping wet. I knew she didn't protest as I didn't feel any teeth. My first finger worked her vagina as I moved my middle finger down to her anus. I smeared the juices around it and inserted my fingertip.

Her speed had noticeably slowed as the oni were almost out of sight in front of us.

"Don't slow down or I'll stop." I whispered into her furry ear.

I could hear her breathing hard as she caught up. I moved my fingers up to her clit and began running them in slick motions around it. My other arm snaked slowly up her thin body under her shirt. I ran my finger lightly over each rib until I reached her tiny breasts. I found her swollen nipple and pinched it between my fingers.

One of her hands reached down to grab my wrist. She squeezed it tightly and directed it back towards her entrance.

I continued to finger her as Nex continued to milk me. Nex had been paying attention and knew what I was doing as I felt her hand alongside mine, gripping and rubbing Liz's other breast.

I could tell Liz was getting close as with each step she took she clinched around my fingers.

I released her nipple and moved my hand down to tease her anus. I slowly inserted my fingers, she could only take two as I now violated both her holes.

As she moved from side to side to avoid trees my fingers only dug deeper pulling her open and exposing her more.

She was now letting out a steady stream of quiet moans as she ran, not daring to slow down as she knew I would stop. Nex seemed to be a slave to her pleasure as her back arched noticeably now, not paying attention to anything around her.

I felt something hard displacing my fingers in Liz's vagina. I moved my fingers to her clit focusing my attention wholeheartedly on it.

I leaned forward to see what she was doing, only to see her staff protruding from her as she used both arms to feverishly move it in and out.

My fingers in her anus felt like they were melting as her muscles twitched around them.

I could feel my next orgasm coming as I shot my seed into Nex for the second time. She buried her face into Liz's back as her hips bucked against me. Liz stopped dead in her tracks as fluid gushed from her coating my hands in her ecstasy. She shivered there for a while as my cum dripped from Nex down her back.

She reached a hand back between Nex and myself coating her fingers in our juices before shoving it forcefully into her mouth savoring the flavor as she continued to shake under me.

I could tell Nex was spent as her body went limp sliding down Liz's back. She now gripped Liz's waist as if holding on for dear life, her body jerking sporadically.

I knew now from experience that my orgasm wouldn't end with just this.

I pulled out of Nex with a wet sound as I slid down Liz's back landing behind her.

I thrust my still cumming members into Liz's rear entrances as she was still weak from cumming from her front ones. I had forgotten that she was still a virgin here as I felt a slight resistance break when I entered her.

I continued to come inside Liz as I thrust in and out of her like a mad man. Soon she was hunkered down as if desperately struggling to receive everything I was pumping into her.

She must have finally been filled to the brim as my seed began to explode from her. It ran down her delicate legs and pooled beneath us as I continued to gush inside her.

She now had her staff dug into the ground to stay upright as she took it all in. I could tell she was on the verge of her second orgasm as her upper body buckled under her, her front knees hitting the ground as she thrust her rear into me.

She now made no attempt whatsoever to hide her cries as my member kissed her womb. Her tight passage struggled against me as she came again.

I pumped the last of what I had into her and she fell to all four knees helplessly as I slid out of her.

"John, please, make me yours officially. Stain me with your seed!" She yelled in the throws of passion.

I wondered why she wanted to make it official the goblin way, did she think those were my customs as well. I moved around in front of her as she took me into her mouth cleaning me. She went the full length on one member then the other. She was definitely experienced, I could tell because when she was done I was almost ready to go again.

"You are mine. Every little bit of you is mine. Every imperfection, every fault, every thought, I own them all. You will bring my children into this world and you will be by my side until the end." I said.

Her entire body shook at my words as if she came again. Perhaps this was what she had been waiting to hear her entire life.

I did want her, I desired her, needed her and longed for her but if it weren't for Nex bringing me to the brink, I wasn't sure when I would have made a move.

Chapter 34: Reaching The Goblin Camp — John

I had succumbed to Nex's temptation and we had mated. In the throes of passion, I had also dragged Liz into it against my better judgment.

We stood there facing each other. Her lips were glossy from her earlier work.

Liz seemed so small now. She was looking at the ground between us, afraid to look me in the eye. Her body trembled as she drew her arms into her chest in a self-hug. Was she was worried I would abandon her now that I was done?

I pulled her close and kissed her deeply as if for the first time. I let her tongue run throughout my mouth as her thin arms clasped me tightly, like she believed I would be gone when she released me.

I returned her embrace, pressing her close to myself. I needed her to realize that I would not throw her away. I had not just used her. She was mine now, and I intended to keep her.

I pressed my lips into hers and continued to kiss her. I had no other way to show her how I felt.

Though I may have many, I wanted her to know that she was special to me, unique in her own way. I was sure my seed had taken root inside her, but I didn't feel like that was enough.

I clutched her softly in my arms. I allowed my mouth to travel from her mouth to her neck as I licked and sucked her tender skin, leaving red marks and hickeys. I would mark her as mine for all who viewed her.

I nibbled gently on her ears as I felt the heat from her skin on my lips. She cooed softly in my arms and seemed to relax.

"I will never abandon you." I told her with certainty in my voice as I whispered into her ear.

She loosened her grasp and let me move freely. I moved my head back and looked into her wet eyes. I could tell that she had truly given herself over to me, trusting that whatever fate was to befall her, she would face it proudly by my side.

"I have finally found the place I belong," she said as she searched my eyes with hers.

If she was looking for doubt or insincerity, she wouldn't find it here. She kissed me once more. It was a sweet, gentle kiss that seemed to express both our feelings. I felt a warm sensation blooming inside me and knew I could never be apart from her again.

I released her as she spoke. "Next time, I want to look you in the eyes as we..." She looked down nervously again before finishing. "Mate."

She then looked back up to me as if finding her courage. "I won't take no for an answer anymore." A smile spread across her face.

"I will do that, and I will watch you as you succumb to your wild side, gazing into your eyes as you take every part of me." I replied as a deep crimson spread across her cheeks.

I mounted her once again, moving Nex up to a sitting position as Liz ran at a furious pace to catch up to the oni. It had started to get late into the evening and I was wondering how Bob's trip had gone. I hoped those girls would find happiness.

I thought about Leera and Lina back in the cave with the dryad. Hopefully Leera won't be too angry at me for leaving her with a lunatic. I'm sure they're all just sitting around eating something, as there's really not much else to do in the cave. Looking back on it, I don't think I told either of them where I was going. I was just in a hurry to get away from the awkward clinginess of the dryad.

Thinking of Leera and Lina had reminded me of their son. I remembered that night. At first I saw him as a burden or

even an enemy, but now I can see his face clearly, crying and laughing. I remember his big eyes staring at me in amazement over every little thing. I saw a little of both of them in him, and I think when that connection was made in my subconscious mind, he became like a son to me. Then those men saw fit to tear apart his home and torture him to death. To torture my son to death! *My son!* My disciple! I now understood my anger earlier. Without me realizing it, this has become all too personal.

I don't want to just save the village. I want to kill them all. I want to torture their families and talk about it like it's nothing. True, I had given them a grotesque end and an eternity of pain, but it wasn't enough. They needed to feel how I felt. I wanted them to understand what they had done.

I activated Soul Steal. I could hear them screaming. I listened as I rode. It soothed me, and I began to calm down.

I canceled Soul Steal.

They would have a front-row seat as I killed all their little friends. Then the goblin village will be filled with torches.

I saw Reginauld's head peek up from the red oni's shoulder. He yelled, "We should slow our pace down. We're almost there."

The sun was setting, and it was about twilight.

This would be a good time to attack.

I needed to come up with a strategy before we were there. My original plan had been a frontal assault with the oni leading, but now I didn't want to risk allowing any of them to escape. I wanted to surround them, but I didn't have the numbers. After I had encountered the six thugs walking through the forest without a care in the world, I realized that they probably didn't have the brains to post archers in the trees. They may not even have any scouts or lookouts. It's a sad day indeed when Thads is considered the smart one. I really hope he came this way.

My new strategy would be a one-sided slaughter. I would be the killer and the focus of their attention. I would have the oni guarding the path. I would station the goblins in the trees, and I would trust Liz and Nex to kill the ones who ran off into the woods. With Liz's speed I was confident that she would be able to catch them, and Nex had already showed me her mastery of Life Sense, though for her it seemed also to be a way to express her feelings.

We slowed down and began to move more quietly. Even the oni took special care to avoid obstacles and watch their footing.

I dismounted Liz; my own speed was enough here, and this would give her legs a chance to recover.

As we got closer I saw an orange glow in the distance and heard cries of pain. My stomach dropped, as by now I knew what to expect from these people.

I gestured for everybody to gather and filled them in on my plan.

I was to go into the village alone and take them off guard, much like what happened in Thads' camp. When they had gathered around me I would start the massacre. I ordered everyone to fill the forest with fog and use Life Sense to attack the ones that ran. I ordered Liz to focus on spears in large numbers in order to fire quickly rather than destroying the entire village with a glacier.

When my explanation was done, the red oni looked like he had something to say but held his tongue. I was sure my feelings about this situation were plastered on my face as no one said a thing and just moved into position.

I took a deep breath and set off walking toward the village. With each step the screams grew louder, and my anger overwhelmed my sense of dread a little more.

Chapter 35: The Town — Bob

I had been running all day and had some time to reflect. You know, that thing I do all the time. I guess it's a habit that got ingrained into my soul, what with all the time spent with nothing at all to do but burn, plus my time spent waiting for a new body.

I've had a lot of fun over the past day and a half. Boss sure knows how to throw a guy a welcome back party. I got to rampage to my heart's content and let off all my built up frustrations. I'm sure he doesn't know, but it's boring as hell inside him. It's all just blackness and whispers. Mors talked to me a few times when I thought I would lose my mind from boredom, but she never got close enough to let me have any real fun.

After what happened, I can honestly say the Boss is a demented son of a bitch. I used to think I was bad, but damn! At night we slaughtered everything wholesale. Then he gave me people and told me to violate them. Then he mounted heads on spikes and gave 'em back their souls. Then it was all sunshine and butterfly farts as I played with a bunch of little girls like it was a birthday party. Literally, we went from Kill! Rape! to Play with little girls! It was kind of the perfect day.

I knew there was a reason I liked that guy. I wonder if he knows just how fucked up this all is? I heard it when I was in his mind. I could feel something writhing all around me in the blackness. It seemed to like me, though. At least that's the impression I got. It was more like a feeling, a familiar one like meeting an old friend you hadn't talked to in ten years.

The girls had been little angels this whole trip. We had one scare when the red-haired one, I'm calling her Wendy,

almost fell off again, but Roscia caught her and chastised her for getting too relaxed.

I couldn't imagine clinging onto something for so long without needing a break. But then again I wouldn't have imagined that I would be able to run nonstop for hours at a time, either. These bodies Boss gave us are something else.

The girls had been yelling at me to go this way and that way. I didn't think they really knew which way home was, and we wasted a ton of time just running in random directions. I don't think anyone thought this through. We were just lucky we found a road while we were lost. I had been following that for most of this trip.

We were probably making good time now without me having to worry about low hanging limbs smacking them in the face or knocking them off. They were good sports about it, though now most of them looked like tree people with all the leaves and vines that were tangled in their hair.

I had a few close calls when I smelled someone in the distance coming up the road. I had to dodge back into the forest and continue that way until the threat passed, but we were finally there.

Roscia, I'm calling her Rosie now, had told me that this place was her home. I made sure to stay hidden in the treeline. Three of the girls got off, the sisters and Wendy. Wendy gave me a big hug before running off. The sisters just smiled and took off after her.

I watched for a while as they disappeared into the distance. Rosie looked sad.

"You can go home, too, if ya want. I know you told the boss you wanted to stay with him, but that was just in the heat of the moment. Boss just wants you to be happy." I told her while smiling at her.

"What I said wasn't wrong. If I went back, they would just send me off again." She tried to hide a snuffle.

I nodded to her. I'm guessing they would. This place looked like shit. The houses looked run down. The gardens

were a pathetic mismatch of withered crops, and there wasn't a single animal in sight. In fact, there was no one in sight, and it wasn't even that dark yet. No lights came from any windows, and no one met the girls.

I knew the boss would kill me for this, but I was curious what this place was like. I decided to explore it for a while.

"Rosie, Blondie, you guys stay here. Something doesn't smell right." I told them.

I used my speed to get behind the closest building and let out my fog. That's it, make it nice and thick; I don't need any traumatized villagers spreading weird horror stories about me.

I activated Life Sense and darted carefully from building to building. I could hear sobbing from a crack in the wall and looked in to see a woman sitting in a chair by a small table.

I canceled Life Sense.

Oops, that could have been bad; nothing sparks nightmares like a glowing red eye watching you through a hole in the wall. Besides, I could think of many better uses for holes in walls. I heard the woman go silent. I looked around the room from my limited vantage point to see a man enter. He hurriedly closed the door behind him and sat across from her, placing his hands on hers.

"Why did you make me do this! They're both gone now. We didn't even get paid for either one," she said as she wiped her face and hung her head in her hands.

"We didn't have a choice! We took a chance with Threscia, but with Roscia any chance is better than none at all. It was her turn, Nadine!" the man said as he balled his fists up in anger.

They're talking about Rosie. I'm guessing that these are her parents. I can kind of see the resemblance in the mother.

The woman jumped to her feet and got in the man's face before speaking in a pleading tone. "It was just one year!

One year, and she would have been safe. Why couldn't they just have waited a little longer?"

"We're starving; more of us die because of that than anything else. The only way anyone in this village is still alive is the money from the Duke's son and the meat." He spoke in a flat, broken tone, his voice cracking as if he was admitting something.

"Don't you dare call them meat! We still have three more children that..." She stopped speaking as a large sob wracked her body and she fell forward.

The man caught her in his arms and they both fell to the floor in a heap.

"It's only right. What do you think we've been eating? What do you think keeps our children alive? You remember Tomlus, Roscia's little friend? You remember how crushed Ranlis and Delissa were, but we lived, and they lived, because of their sacrifice. If we don't do it as well, how can we ever look them or anyone else here in the eye?" His words were strong as he spoke, but his expression didn't show any belief in what he had said.

"We could just leave! Let's save ourselves from this life; we shouldn't be forced to live this way," she pleaded as she clung tightly to him.

"Do you see any horses here? Any carriages or wagons? The closest city is Therograd, and there's nowhere to live there. We would end up in the slums, where we would likely starve anyway unless you sold yourself, and that's only if we were able to get away. The forest may kill us, or bandits, or even our own people if they knew we were leaving. It would be five fewer sacrifices that they would need to make." His tone was full of fury.

"Our children might not be old enough yet, but it's only a matter of time, and I can't take it, Darius. The next time one of their names gets drawn, I'll volunteer. I won't see my children butchered, and I can't bear the thought of watching everyone eating them."

Shit! How old was Wendy again? I can't leave her here!

I activated Life Sense and tore off into the fog. How the hell am I going to find her? There's no way I'm letting her stay here. That cute little ball of innocence becoming someone's pot roast after she survived hell and the boss went through all that trouble just don't sit right with me. Think, Bob, think!

She had been riding me all day and was wearing a bandit's clothes; maybe if I try to smell her out I can figure out where she went. I tried to remember the bandit's scent and the smell of the forest. I ran so fast the wind threatened to tear my fur out. I almost crashed into Blondie.

Fuck! Wrong one. I sniffed her just to make sure I had the right scent.

"Stop it, that tickles," she said between laughs.

"Look girls, Wendy's in big trouble. I need to get her out of here!" I said in a panic.

Rosie jumped up onto my back without a second's hesitation and began pointing me along. I got to a small, run-down shack on the far outskirts of town. I inhaled deeply; yep, that's sweaty-forest-bandit scented.

I activated Life Sense and could see blobs forming as I got closer to the thin walls of the shack. There was one form. I looked for a crack in the wall but couldn't find anything. I finally just canceled Life Sense and peered through the window. There was a lone woman hugging a long shirt and sobbing. She had copper colored hair, but it was too long to be Wendy's.

I retreated to the outskirts of the village and began sniffing feverishly as I traced its perimeter.

"Is there any place they told ya not to go?" I asked Rosie as I continued to sniff around.

"The jerky tent?" Rosie replied in an inquisitive tone.

"Take me there now!" I demanded.

Rosie pointed me farther outside of the village to a shack with a tent off to the side.

I smelled the scent of death alongside fresh blood.

"Fuck!" I yelled as I tore through the tent. Inside I saw skinless limbs and thinly sliced meat hanging on racks. There was one skinless torso split in half hanging from two hooks in front of me.

Oh, Boss, please let that not be her. I moved up closer, dreading what I would find, but there was no head. There was nothing at all that I could use to tell its identity. I smelled it; it wasn't fresh.

I almost sighed a breath of relief before realizing my search wasn't over.

I could hear screaming coming from the shack.

I placed Rosie on the ground and burst through the flimsy door, shattering it and most of the wall into a rain of splinters. These doors just weren't made for the plus-sized gentleman.

What I saw wasn't just Wendy; it was one of the sisters, as well. Both were hanging from ropes by their wrists tied to a beam on the ceiling with their ankles bound together and chained to a large iron clump on the ground.

A man with a leather apron shrieked at me as he brandished a long, curved knife, waving it frantically in front of him as if trying to drive me away.

On the table was another body. It was female. I knew immediately who it was by the short black hair. She still had tears flowing from her eyes as her severed head looked at me. It was the older sister. Not long ago she had been playing with me and riding me. Now this asshole had to go and chop her up. At least this time he started with her head.

I was on him in seconds. I had already bitten his hand off and had him pinned under me. He was yelling gibberish as he flailed helplessly around. Why does it always make me hard when they struggle? I mauled him, ripping him apart piece by piece and savoring the taste. Finally his screams stopped as I chomped his head. Hard on the outside and

creamy on the inside. I'm sure he'll have pleasant memories to take back to the afterlife now.

I sat on my haunches and removed his apron. I wrapped the elder sister's head in it. There may be nothing I can do about this, but I know a guy.

I searched the butcher's body and found the keys. It was hard to move in this tiny place. I unlocked the girl's feet. It looked like they had been knocked unconscious, as Wendy had a small trickle of blood flowing down her neck from the back of her head. I knew they were alive because I could hear their breathing.

They were both naked. I stripped the butcher, but one pair of pants and one mangled shirt was all he had on.

I cut the girls down with my nails and gently laid them on the floor. I put the shirt on Wendy, though it was sticky with blood and hard to get on, and put the pants on the younger sis. They didn't fit. Her feet were at shin level and I didn't think she could walk like that. I took the pants back off as I heard a small cry behind me.

Rosie stood in the shredded doorway. She had her hands covering her mouth as she looked from the body on the table to the mangled man on the floor. Gradually her eyes came to rest on Wendy and the younger sister while I was still pulling the pants off.

"This isn't what it looks like, I swear!" I said.

She sat down in the doorway and spoke as her eyes teared up. "All this time we've been eating people..." She trailed off in shock.

"You too, eh." I tried to joke, but she didn't respond.

I ripped the legs off the pants right above the knee. I put the pants back on the girl and tied the fabric to her midsection. It don't look right, but it should cover her goods.

"Who... Who's that on the table?" Rosie asked as fear showed on her face.

"That's this one's older sister. Don't worry, though, I'll have Boss put her back together later. You definitely made

the right choice in coming with us. I overheard that you were next on that list!" I said.

She froze as her face turned pale, then she sat there for a while as I carried the two girls back over to her and laid them down. I went back for the older one's head and brought it over, laying it on top of the younger sister.

"Help me wake them up. We're getting out of this shitty town." I told her.

She seemed to snap out of it a bit and helped load them on my back. She hopped on top of me and cradled the head in her lap. Neither girl stirred no matter how she yelled at them. I think they're out for the night.

I walked quickly back toward Blondie and yelled at her to hop on. She had told me earlier that she was from one of the richer houses but had no idea how to get back home, so she was coming along with us until we could find out more.

I headed out of there as quickly as I could without dropping the sleeping girls. I could tell where the cave was by its smell. With my nose it practically broadcast its location for miles around. It really wasn't too far from this village. Just a few miles at most.

When I got there, hopefully Leera could take care of them, then me and the Boss could take care of this village.

Chapter 36: Retaking the Goblin Village — John

I crouched in the darkness after scouting the area. My blood was boiling. I had been listening to the screams as I waited for my opportunity. They were in goblin. They were roasting them alive. Not for food but simply to watch them suffer.

I heard them laugh every now and then; apparently they had brought their food and drink here already and were enjoying the drink a little too much.

By the state of relaxation they were in, I could guess that Thads hadn't come this way. He had abandoned them to their fate.

I got to my feet and started exhaling my sleeping fog as I walked toward the center of the village.

A drunken man came barreling around a building. I stabbed him in the throat with a bone spike before he could even register what had happened and left him bleeding on the ground as I moved on.

I was getting nearer to the jubilant voices as the mass of goblin bodies got thicker. I looked around at the scene. I could see young ones still clutched in their mother's arms, old ones cut limbless, and warriors still grasping their stone weapons, refusing to let go of hope even in death. I could see one goblin in the distance. He was isolated, his face was caved in, and I could see a spike protruding from his arm.

That's him. That's my son. Two men seemed to be in a fist fight not far away from him. One got knocked back and tripped over my disciple's body.

"Damn goblin piece of shit! You tripped me!" the man said as he stood up and kicked the young goblin's body.

My legs carried me at a high speed as I flew at the man. I grabbed him by the throat and slammed him into the ground. Before he could even gasp, I was kicking him in the

face. Everything started to turn to red mush as I furiously stomped him.

"You don't get to kick my son!" I yelled as the other man stared at me with wide-eyed shock. His friend gurgled at my feet before loudly emptying his bowels. I heard the laughing stop. *I think they're onto me.*

I drew my weapon as I lunged at him. I swung low, hitting him with enough impact to sever one of his legs as he spun in the air. He landed roughly on his head with an audible crunch then lay twitching.

I looked back at my boy. I used Soul Steal. I wouldn't risk letting him down again. I canceled Soul Steal.

I exhaled a large gout of sleeping fog, filling the area around me as men came charging around the mud building to investigate the noise.

They fell flat on their faces and I decapitated them. It would save me trouble later.

I caught a glimpse of a man watching me from the corner. When he saw me look at him, he screamed and ran.

"We're under attack!" he shrieked.

I charged out into the open. The men around the fire were clumsily tying their weapons back on as the goblins writhed in the background behind the fire.

I cast Weakness and a few of them fell back down to the ground. These men didn't have a cause to fight for; they had no motivations at all to prevent them from running away, and that's what a few of them did.

"We have runners!" I yelled toward the forest as I charged forward using Dark Tendrils to keep most of them in place and rooted to the ground. They were all screaming now.

I walked around the tangled mass of bodies and decapitated them slowly, using the teeth of my weapon to saw through their bone. I made sure to leave a few alive; I wouldn't let them die so easily. There was a large man rooted in front of a chest. I'm assuming that he was their

boss for this excursion. Behind him was the large bonfire. The goblins were tied to posts in front of the fire at a practiced distance that kept them burning but still alive.

I cast Dark Tendrils once more and walked over to the goblins. I cut them down as they clawed at me in horror.

"I gob's god. I sorry I not here earlier." I told them as they continued to writhe around in agony.

I set them on the ground a distance away from the fire and used Fleshcrafting to mend what I could. I had to discard what was already too burnt. There was another row of goblins tied to a large log behind them. I guessed that those pricks had intended to do this all night.

I heard screams from the forest as an idea hit me.

"You untie." I said as I pointed the charred goblins to the goblins tied to the log.

I had already killed many of the men, but there were still about a dozen of them left.

I activated Soul Steal and received seven souls.

I grabbed the fat one as he screamed in protest and tried to use his girth to escape me.

"I wonder if you'll smell like pork." I growled as a look of realization flashed across his sweaty face.

"No! You can't mean to..." His eyes were streaming tears, and his fat face shot drool when he continued to speak. "But I'm human! Human!" He struggled against me with all his weight, but it was pointless.

I tied him to the middle post as his pants caught fire and he began screaming. He pissed himself as if in an effort to put out the blaze that was gradually engulfing him.

I walked back around to the goblins as more screams came from the woods behind me.

"Come, you watch, you drink." I gestured to the bloody ground on the other side of the fire. I carried the ones who could not walk and sat them down.

I grabbed another man and tied him to the next pole as he and the fat man screamed obscenities at me. I tied the

final man to the last post and sat with the goblins as we watched them struggle and plead. The last one just kept repeating, "This can't be happening!" over and over again as I smiled at him.

This seemed to have quite the effect on the remaining men as they struggled frantically against the Tendrils.

I walked around and Fleshcrafted their wrists together while removing their Achilles tendons.

I went to my son's body and brought it to the pile of dead men. I would make him a new body.

"Mors, I want to impart everything I can to him. I want him to have a body similar to mine, but we must recreate his face. I still want him to be himself."

"Yes, Master," she replied somberly, as if sensing my sadness.

I started Fleshcrafting, and we got to work. I combined three bodies into him, thickening his muscle and bone density. I had been itching to try something new. I continued to condense it, making him skinnier than me but much denser. I focused on fast-twitch muscle fiber.

He was now almost my height but had a more angular frame. I lengthened his arms to fall below his knees as mine did originally. I gave a set of two bone spikes per arm, one to shoot forward from the forearm and one to shoot backwards from the elbow. All four spikes were around sixteen inches and protruded a few inches from his skin. I looked at his face and fixed his teeth to be like mine.

I changed his skin tone to a light grey color and removed the wisps of hair he had, leaving him bald.

I imparted all abilities to him and changed his eye color to match mine. I used Blend, and everything smoothed out.

I walked around a while using Soul Steal on all the dead bandits in the area and opened my soul window.

I dragged all their skills over Soul of A Goblin Disciple. I looked at his skills.

Skills:

Hunting: level 2
Fishing: level 2
Farming: level 2
Hide: level 3
Stealth: level 4
Swordsmanship: level 4
Archery: level 4
Knifework: level 4
Daggerwork: level 5

It's likely that this group was mainly farmers, hunters, and inexperienced cutthroats. Still, he's fairly well balanced now.

"Mors, teach him English."

I dragged his soul over to the body.

His eyes shot open as he screamed, "God John! Please save..." His voice cut off as he saw me.

His eyes went wet as he hugged me. "I knew you would come! I told the other gobs, but they didn't believe me," he said as he wept. He may have had a grown-up body now, but he was still a kid and a messy crier.

His eyes flitted behind me as he noticed the screaming from the fire.

I remembered how Reginauld had told me just how much it means to be named. To name a goblin is to claim them as a member of your family, to take responsibility for them and their safety.

"I've decided I will name you Athan. It's a part of my name, and you're a part of my family." I said as he turned his attention back to me.

His bottom lip quivered, but his tears momentarily stopped as he spoke. "A part of your family?"

"Yes. I've realized it only recently, but I think of you like a son, as Leera and Lina do." I said softly.

He hugged me again as he sobbed loudly. He pulled back his snot-covered face and spoke. "Why did you do all of this? I don't deserve it. I'm just a gob, I can't be the son of a god."

"But you are. I've seen your merits, I've heard your prayers, and I came here — for you. Now puff out your chest, my boy, and show me that you are a man worthy of that honor."

His eyes sparkled as they had in the cave that night. He wiped his face and noticed his new body for the first time.

"I will honor you, father," he said strongly in a voice that was deeper than he was used to.

He stood up.

"Don't forget pants. I once heard that gobs don't wear them, but I'll be damned if my son walks around in a loincloth." I said.

He looked around and started undressing a tall bandit. Ah, my boy's first pair of Normal Guy pants. He put on all of the bandit's leather armor, plus the shoes and sword and dagger belt.

He looked back at me and stifled another sniffle. He hardened his resolve and got himself together before walking over to the other goblins and beginning a conversation as they examined him in amazement.

He noticed the men burning by the fire and smiled wickedly.

I felt the ground shake slightly as I saw the two oni running toward me. They were covered in blood and muck. Liz appeared beside me with Nex on her back. They seemed to somehow remain clean, though Nex was missing a few daggers and Liz had a cut on her shoulder.

Nex hopped down and looked around at the bodies. As she scanned the dead goblins, her teeth clenched. She walked around to each and chirped, I assumed calling their names. She dragged them into a line and began closing their eyes.

A loud shriek came from the fire. I guessed last man finally realized that this was real as his adrenaline wore off.

Nex wandered over to the fire as a tear rolled down her face.

That's right, her family had been roasted this way. I didn't know if this was cathartic or damaging to her. From what she told me on our trip, she was spared the same fate by a large man with an axe when she went to investigate where her family had disappeared to.

She looked back at me as she let the tears flow from her eyes. Her mouth formed a sad smile.

I walked over to her and knelt down to hug her. She kissed me for a moment and said, "I know I've said it many times since we met, but thank you." I kissed her salty tears away as I held her close.

"Athan, come." I said, and my son rose to his feet. He now towered over the goblins around him. He ran and was in front of me a few seconds later.

"This is my mate, Nex." I said as he looked her over.

"Nex, this is my son." I said as I gestured to Athan.

"Wow, she's as beautiful as mom and, um, mom," he said awkwardly as if unsure how to address his former parents.

Nex spoke in goblin and did the cute chirp I knew was her name. Athen looked shocked as he looked from her to me and nodded. He said something that sounded like a dog's yelp while pointing to himself, and it was Nex's turn to be shocked.

"That makes sense, she was always the strongest," he said as he smiled at Nex.

"But you were always the weakest," she said while laughing.

"Not anymore!" he said in a voice that sounded like a jilted teen's.

The oni sat as Reginauld and his children hopped down and approached.

Reginauld looked at the dead goblins and shook his head, then he looked up at the burning men and nodded with a smile.

"Hello, John," he said as he approached. "I approve."

"And who is this fine lad?" he said as he held his hand out to Athan.

"I'm Athan, I used to be — " a yelp.

Reginauld's eyes went wide as he patted Athan's hand and spoke to me. "A fine choice, Chief, a fine choice."

"I think so, too." I said as I patted Athan's head.

I noticed Liz and the little gobs watching the fire. The kids had angry looks on their faces as they stared at the men. I could feel the hatred radiating, from them. Liz on the other hand, smiled as if she were watching a sunset.

Nex hugged herself up beside me as we all watched.

The fat man had stopped screaming, and I guessed he was unconscious.

I told Athan to finish him off then swap him for the next one.

He walked up to the large man and thrust his spike into his chest. He then untied him and carried him like he was nothing over toward the incapacitated men on the ground. He let the crispy, fat man fall like a sack of potatoes as he walked over to the next bandit and grabbed him roughly. The bandit squirmed and pleaded as Athan ripped his arms apart only to tie them back together behind the post the fat man had occupied.

Liz grabbed my hand and pulled me away from Nex.

"There's something I need to show you." She practically dragged me along into the forest.

We reached a large tree and she maneuvered me in front of it, facing her. She pressed me against it with all her strength as she pulled off her shirt. She pressed her naked body into me so hard that I couldn't breathe. She undid my leather armor, throwing it to the side.

"I told you, I won't take no for an answer," she said through heavy breaths.

She moved her arms down, untying my pants as the twins responded in full force, pressing against her.

She moved her lower body away for just a second before slamming back into me, forcing my members into her sopping holes. I gasped as I suddenly entered her deeper than I had ever been in anyone before. I was buried in her womb and deep inside her ass.

She leaned forward and began kissing me as she slammed into me shaking the tree behind me. She ground our hips together with all her strength as if trying to break my pelvis as she twitched around my girth.

I moved my hand forward to grasp her tiny breasts, however she grabbed my arms and pushed them back behind me as she continued to force me into herself mercilessly. She moved her mouth down and began to kiss and suck on my neck so hard that I thought she might draw blood.

She arched her back, pressing her hard nipples against my chest as she began to moan. I could feel her spasm around me as she called my name. Her body tensed and she released my arms. I wrapped her in an embrace not allowing her to slip away as I thrust into her.

I could feel my orgasm building as she leaned back to look into my eyes. I heard some stirring in the forest in front of me. I could make out Nex's outline against the light of the distant fire.

I kissed Liz as I came. Liz's eyes shined with satisfaction for a moment as a warm liquid gushed from her coating us both in a mixture of our juices. Liz continued to gush against me as Nex began to finger herself with all her might.

Liz slumped to her knees as I continued to come, coating her face and breasts. Nex moved forward and began licking us both clean, her eyes a golden blaze in the darkness. She leaned in and began to kiss Liz sharing my semen between them.

Liz swallowed before taking my still hard member into her mouth. Nex followed suit and took my other member

into her mouth as well. They both began bobbing their heads taking in the last of my seed as I continued coming.

After a few minutes the flow stopped and Liz rose to her hooves. She kissed me passionately for a while before turning around and presenting her ass. Nex hopped on top of her and lay on her, back to back.

I pressed my hard members against each of their waiting asses and entered them. After a moment of resistance I felt them give way allowing me to plunge into their depths. This had nothing at all to do with reproduction, it was all just pure unadulterated pleasure. I Held Nex's legs to keep her from falling off as I pushed myself into them both.

Liz shed her nervous exterior and had began moaning like a banshee as Nex bit her own lip forming a small trickle of blood that ran down her angelic face. I thrust wildly into them, enjoying the different feelings. Nex's muscles where determined to milk me dry with their powerful shaking waves and Liz's tightness was only comparable to Lina's as she squeezed me as if not wanting to let me go.

As I felt myself on the verge of coming again, I reached down and began rubbing each of their clits. Nex began arching her hips as she drew her knees up to her ample bosoms. Liz dropped her front legs down to her knees as she caressed her nipples with one hand while her other one was rubbing her front-clit which was still slick with my seed.

They both surrendered themselves to me as pleasure overtook them and they came. Nex's anus was sucking me for all she was worth while Liz's slit sprayed me with her love. I came deep inside of both of them, moving my hips like a madman. I filled them both up, my seed spilling out of them, coating the ground in a large puddle as I came.

I pulled out of their asses and thrust into their neglected slits. Just my head was inside them as I kept gushing into their warm gooey depths. Nex twitched a few times before closing her eyes and clamping her legs around me. Liz fell to all four knees as I sprayed the rest of my seed on her back. I

bent down and inserted myself back into her ass as I finished coming into both of them.

Liz seemed to be melting into the ground as Nex finally released me to lay down on the ground beside me, her body writhing as her orgasm ended.

I wasn't done yet. I rolled Liz over onto her back and plugged both her rear holes as I teased her front ones. As I continued plunging into her, she began to make some very unladylike noises.

I felt her orgasm again as Nex moved to her upper body and bit into Liz's nipples with her sharp teeth.

Liz was panting so hard she seemed likely to hyperventilate. I sank in deep, my twins spurting the last of my love into her as I finally claimed her completely.

We all caught our breath there on the forest ground for a moment before I rose to my feet. Liz's eyes were tightly shut, her face had a labored expression as she continued to squirt from both her slits. Nex was wet with Liz's and my juices as she continued to rub herself in them, making her body slick.

I felt myself growing hard again but there was no one else here who could take it.

I grabbed Nex's hips and dragged her to Liz's upper openings. I pressed her face into Liz's front entrance as I once again buried myself inside of them both.

I pulled Nex's long hair as Liz gave me a pained expression that seemed to say she'd had enough. I slapped Nex's ass as she yelped in surprise.

"Lick her clean my lovely little Goblin mate and I'll reward you." I said as both their eyes flashed for a moment with excitement.

Liz was now breathing out a steady stream of fog as Nex's tongue worked feverishly on her.

I leaned forward and kissed Nex as my twins stretched them both to their limits.

I came quickly this time as my excitement reached it's limit. I felt Nex begin to spasm as Liz sprayed us all and we all came together.

At long last, we each lay there spent. I had Liz on my right and Nex on my left as we snuggled each other, nude under the moonlight.

I noticed the sound of insects in the distance as Liz moved forward to kiss me again. Nex moved herself up and kissed us both before settling herself back into my armpit. I remained there for a while just listening to them breathing, enjoying the feeling of their warm skin pressed against me. Liz nuzzled her nose against my neck as Nex threw her leg across my waist.

We fell asleep there in the forest all tangled together while I thought about how to restore the goblin village.

Chapter 37: Plans — John

Nothing could prepare me for the horror of what I awoke to — Bob's smiling face inches away from mine. I stifled a screech as I figured out what I was looking at.

"Damnit, Bob! Be careful with that mug of yours. You almost gave me a heart attack." I said as a shrill screech came from Liz and ice began forming in the air above us.

"Liz! Stop, it's just Bob." The ice in the air dissipated, turning into cold water that rained down on us all.

Liz wiggled away from me in a rush to find her shirt as Nex and I gasped from the unexpected shower. Bob shook his fur, spraying us and everything in the area with a mix of dirt, blood, and water.

"Mornin' Boss!" Bob said cheerily.

"Morning, Bob. Maybe nudge me or try calling my name next time instead of just staring at me." I said with a hint of annoyance.

"But you all looked so sweet cuddled up together, I couldn't resist. Anyway, we got problems! Older sis is dead again, and there's this village we need to enlighten," he said with an angry expression.

"How the hell did that happen? You didn't..." I said worriedly.

"What!? No, no, these girls aren't in my strike zone. They're all just too damn adorable. I prefer a girl with a bit of gristle." Bob stared off in space for a moment, then shook his head and seemed to focus before resuming. "It's the town, Rosie's home. They're killin' the kids there."

"They're what!? Oh god, just how fucked up is this place?"

Athen came running up toward me, pointing a sword at Bob nervously.

"Athen, chill, this is Bob. Bob, this is my son, Athen." As I spoke, Athen lowered his weapon. Bob looked from Nex to me to Athen and raised an eyebrow.

Athen spoke as he and Bob shook hands. "I just got done roasting the last of them. Is it okay if we eat them now? We're all starving."

"Oh, yeah, that's fine, but don't eat their heads, and be sure to leave one body per dead goblin." I responded.

Bob shook his head and laughed to himself as Athen ran back towards the goblin village.

"What exactly is so funny?" I asked Bob.

"You don't even realize it, do ya?" he responded as he shook his head. He once again looked from Nex to me. "I knew goblins were fast breeders, but damn!"

"No, he's not from Nex and me. He's actually Lina and Leera's kid from their previous life, so I adopted him. He's also my disciple." I responded as Nex began to sit up.

"Actually, he is my child, as well. You took me as a mate, so I am also the mother of any children you have, whether or not I birth them." She spoke with her unique accent.

Just why the hell does she have an accent? That question had been bothering me for a while. Reginauld doesn't, unless you count proper English as an accent. Come to think of it, though, Bob does sound kind of like a person from the east coast.

I closed my eyes for a moment.

"Mors?"

She appeared and curtsied. "Yes, Master?"

"Why do Nex and Bob both seem to have accents?"

"It's related to their personalities. In their native languages, they may have spoken in an informal dialect, as Bob does, or they may have strong cultural ties, like Nex."

"So Bob can speak normally, he just subconsciously opts to speak that way?"

"Yes, and Nex speaks with a slight goblin accent because she's so tied to her culture that it's part of her identity."

"Thank you, Mors!" I said as she smiled and vanished.

I felt Nex's arms wrapping around mine as I opened my eyes.

"I will also bring you many, many children," she said as her eyes glowed.

I leaned down and kissed her for a moment before returning my attention to Bob.

Bob bent his head down towards me and untied something from his horn. It looked like a bloody leather ball.

"What's this?" I asked him.

"This is the older sis. They cut her up," he replied sadly.

"How the hell did this happen?" I asked as I unwrapped the leather to see her sad, bloodstained face. It was the same face I remembered from yesterday. The same girl who hugged me and played with Bob.

I felt my anger swell. *I'm adopting the girls, as well. I don't trust anyone anymore, at least not anyone human.*

She was just here, she was just fine, then this. I just wanted her to have a good life, but this world itself seemed to want her dead. I felt something warm running down my face as a cold embrace took me once more. I closed my eyes and focused on the blackness. It seemed to be saying something, not in words but in feelings. It said that this is the nature of this world; everything is predetermined and controlled, everything except me and the ones I've changed.

I felt the darkness press into me. It seemed to say that soon this world itself would attack me. The slight pressure I was feeling became soothing, almost like a hug. It comforted me and gave me a feeling of peace. I knew it was there, that we were together. It was impossible to tell where I ended and it began, but I understood what it meant.

When I opened my eyes, Nex was wiping my face.

"Boss, yer eyes are doing that black gooey thing again." Bob said with a concerned expression.

Nex was staring up at me with sad eyes as she spoke. "It will be okay, my love. I am here for you. Make them pay!"

I rose to my feet.

"Whoa, watch where you're pointing those things." Bob said as he jumped back.

I got dressed and began walking to the goblin village deep in thought. *If this world wants to kill me and the ones I care about then I will raise an army. I will remind it of who is actually in control here.*

First, I will restore the goblins. No, I will improve them. Then we will take the human town. I won't allow this foolishness to continue. I'm going to make my own kingdom and protect my people from whatever this world throws at me — and it all starts now.

***Deathcreator Book One: A Flesh Golem's Ascension
— End***